

The
Divine Event

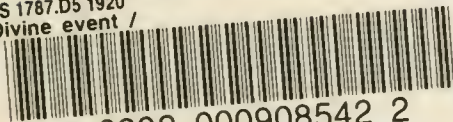
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THE DIVINE EVENT



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BY WILL N. HARBEN

AUTHOR OF

*"The Cottage of Delight," "The Hills of Refuge," "The
Inner Law," "The New Clarion," "Second Choice,"
"The Triumph," etc.*



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CHAPTER I

THE grounds about the mansion were extensive and orderly. Many asphalt drives and walks wound through them from the porticoed front entrance and the porte-cochère on the side of the great stone structure to the main thoroughfare to New York, which on clear days might be seen in the distance and in the rear of the building down a graceful slope to the Hudson.

Hillery Gramling, the bachelor owner of the place, reclined in an easy-chair in the library, a well-lighted room on the ground floor adjoining a stately suite of drawing-rooms. On a table, within his reach, lay a disorderly pile of books, papers, and magazines, boxes of cigars and cigarettes. He was thirty-five years of age, above medium height, well built, and had a sensitive face and shadowy dark eyes.

There was a gentle rap on the closed door.

"Come in," Gramling called out, wearily, and a manservant entered.

"It is the gentleman you were expecting, sir,"

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the butler announced. "I think he said he was Professor Trimble. Are you ready to see him?"

"Yes, show him in here."

The individual who promptly entered was of middle age, short and stocky of make, and wore a full beard, which, like his rather long hair, was stiff and somewhat unruly.

"Well, how are you feeling to-day?" he asked, with a bustling, businesslike air and tone, as Gramling got up and shook his hand.

"About the same," Gramling replied, reseating himself and indicating another chair to his guest. "I've about made up my mind that no doctor on earth could diagnose my case. They all say there is nothing wrong—absolutely nothing. Dr. John P. Armstrong was here yesterday. He only laughed. They all do, after every test."

"I see—I see," Professor Trimble said; "well, I think they are right. I think you are as sound as a silver dollar—physically, I mean. You understand?"

"Yes, but then what is it? I did not send for you for nothing, Professor. I have heard much about your work as a psychologist, alienist, mental scientist, and all that, and—well, I want to talk with you."

"I see," the professor said, "and I think you would prove a reasonable patient of mine—provided, you understand, that you will be perfectly frank and open with me. I want no reservations. Candidly, Mr. Gramling, my time is too valuable

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to waste it in following up false scents and clues. I have my duties to my classes at the college, my writing, and various mental and psychic experiments. I am very busy. I say this frankly so that we may understand each other at the outset."

"You will find me reasonable," Gramling said, grimly. "I may as well admit that I am desperate—so desperate that twice here in this house recently I actually—"

"I understand. You needn't tell me. I see it shadowed in your eyes even now. In fact, I have an idea that I am a sort of last resort."

Gramling nodded gloomily and was silent. Professor Trimble rose, took a cigar from a box and lighted it, and sat down again. For a moment he smoked steadily, his shaggy head resting on the chair-back, his eyes closed. Gramling had heard of the man's hypnotic power and mental suggestions to patients while in a trance condition, and wondered if his own present calmness might be due to some sort of telepathic influence.

Presently Trimble, without raising his head or opening his eyes, said, "I wonder if you could tell me as frank and straight a story of your feelings and experiences as you could tell yourself in your own private thoughts?"

"I think so," Gramling replied. "I know what you are after, and I am willing to try. After all, there is nothing worse to tell than I have already confessed to. I mean my intention to—"

"Of course. Well, go ahead. Let's get down

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to rock bottom and begin right." Trimble raised his head and looked about the big room. "Am I right in surmising that you live here alone in this great place?"

"Since my brother Morten died, exactly a year ago."

"Oh, I believe you did have a brother, and you and he were very intimate!"

"Seldom ever parted, from our earliest childhood till his death."

Gramling rose and went to a row of bookshelves and took down a photograph and brought it to his companion. The professor took it and studied it thoughtfully.

"Handsome man," he said. "Extremely sensitive, artistic, imaginative—something of a mystic, too, I judge."

"All of those things and more," Gramling sighed. "You see, I had an opportunity to know him thoroughly. After our father and sister died he and I lived on here at the home place—that is, when we were in America. We were abroad part of every year."

"Together there also, I take it?"

"Yes, even more constantly than here. We used the same room at hotels quite often, and not for the sake of economy, for we always paid for two or more, but because we liked to be together. I remember once or twice that he expressed himself as being sometimes restless and unhappy in a room by himself, especially in a

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strange place. He was very odd, but more lovable on that account. He had a most appealing way about him. He was often sad when there seemed no reason for it."

"The temperament," the professor remarked. "I think I understand his type. Did he change in the latter part of his life?"

"Decidedly. I'll have to be frank and speak plainly. He and I led the average life of pleasure-seekers who have plenty of money and nothing else to do till about a year before he died. Then he changed. Nothing interested him but the subjects of immortality, renunciation of all sensual things, and mysticism. He added a thousand volumes on that and kindred subjects to this library. You don't see the entire collection. There is an annex as large as this in the basement. He read there constantly during the last year of his life. I have found him there in the dark, in meditation and what he reverently termed orison."

"Did it irritate him to be disturbed at such times?" Trimble inquired.

"No, not at all. His change of habit and thought made him more lovable than ever. He was constantly worried, however, by the fact that I could not enter into his belief and pursuits."

The visitor rose and replaced the photograph on the shelves. "Is it a fact," he asked, turning on Gramling, "that you have lived alone here without occupation of any sort since your brother's death?"

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"Yes. I realized that I ought to be occupied and tried many things. I played golf, drove my own car, rode horseback—"

"Alone?"

"Always. I started to index this library—it has no index, and Morten always wanted one. I had a man try his hand, and he failed in a week—said the work was too far from his home, and he threw it up. I worked at it for a week. It drove me wild. I became so nervous that I could not write clearly. My hand shook."

"Not the sort of thing you needed—too sedentary and confined," declared the professor, "and yet it ought to be done. It is a very disorderly collection. But I fear that we are drifting from our subject. Be open with me. Why did you send for me?"

"I want to know what is the matter with me," Gramling answered, desperately. "As I've told you, my life has become unbearable—simply unbearable. I am physically sound, but—well, I simply suffer excruciatingly. I cannot define my pains, but they exist."

"How many servants do you keep?"

"Only one now—Edward Strong, the man who admitted you. He attends to my room, cooks my meals, and even cleans up the house. I sent all the others away. I couldn't stand their clatter and their wondering glances. I overheard their gossip. They started the report that I was insane. I am not insane. Do you think I am?"

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"I have seen nothing to indicate it so far"—Trimble smiled—"but I am sure that you are keeping back something from me."

It was significant that Gramling made no reply. He leaned forward, his hands clasped between his rigid knees. His lips twitched and quivered. Trimble eyed him steadily from beneath his heavy brows.

"You remember," he suddenly said, "that we were to be quite open in this talk?"

Gramling nodded slowly, twisted his hands together, and then said, "A little over a year ago Morten and I had our first disagreement."

"Oh, I see."

"I lost patience with his mode of life," Gramling sighed. "We had some bitter arguments. I was wrong, wrong, wrong, but did not realize it. I left him here and went to San Francisco. For almost the first time in our lives we were separated."

"And you yourself were upset by it, I presume?"

"I was in hell," Gramling said, with stiff lips. "I would have turned around and gone back, but for my silly pride. I had said that I'd be away a month and I tried to keep my word. Then came the—the—well, the experience which I want you to explain if you can. In fact, that is why I sent for you."

"Something of a psychical nature?" Trimble asked, interested.

"I want you to decide," was the answer. "Let

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me begin at the very first. On my arrival in San Francisco I went to a hotel where Morten and I usually stayed. The journey had been terrible, and my first day in the city was simple agony. I felt that it was in my mind solely. I could not keep from thinking of my brother. He was before my eyes every minute in the day. On the third day of my stay in San Francisco I became ill. I waked with a sharp pain in my right side. I couldn't move without pain. I sent for a physician. He made an examination and pronounced my trouble to be due to a diseased appendix. A consultation with expert surgeons was held. They all agreed that I must be operated on at once."

"And it was done, of course," the professor interpolated, still with his studious stare.

"They took me to a private sanitarium. I was in keen pain part of the time, so much so that I was resigned to whatever might happen. I made a brief will, very hurriedly, leaving all my part of the estate to my brother, with a line, begging his pardon for what I had said on leaving him."

"I want to ask," Trimble broke in, gently—"did you have any serious thoughts about death—I mean at that particular moment?"

"Not about death, exactly," Gramling returned, "for, somehow, I felt that my chances to survive were pretty good, but I am going to be explicit, and I must tell you this: Morten had once told me that when one was in a trance, or under an anæsthetic, that it was possible for one to have

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some sort of psychic experience, and I determined that I would put myself in—well, what one might call a passive or receptive condition.”

“Decidedly interesting,” the professor declared. “Go on, please. How did you go about it?”

“I simply used my will. I determined to give the thing a test. Morten used to say that certain Hindus could temporarily separate their souls from their bodies, and I thought I would see if I could do the same thing.”

“I see. Go ahead—you can’t imagine how you are interesting me.”

“They took me into the dazzling white light of the operating room, put me on the table, and applied the ether mask. The fumes ran through me like fire at first, but soon the sensation became pleasant. I felt myself going, delightfully drifting. It was like floating on clouds.”

“Did you even then try to—to hold on to your consciousness?” Trimble asked. “I mean, did you endeavor to keep your perceptive powers open?”

“I seemed to be willing,” Gramling answered, “that my body should become inanimate and my soul remain intact and open to adventure.”

“And what happened?” the professor asked.

“I seemed to be floating, as I said, but there was a clock on the wall of the operating room, and I could hear it ticking more distinctly, it seemed to me, than any clock I’d ever heard, and I recall that the queer fancy came to me that as

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long as I heard the ticking I'd be bound to matter, so to speak."

"Odd idea," Trimble said, half to himself. "Then you became unconscious?"

"Yes, as far as my body was concerned. In fact, I forgot all about it—absolutely forgot that such a thing ever existed. I was myself, and yet not myself, discarnate, without form. Did you ever have a dream that you could not possibly describe? Well, the things I was seeing and feeling were like that. At this moment I seem to be on the very edge of them, but unable to grasp them as I did then. My tongue gets tied—I feel what I want to say, but can't get it out. For some time I seemed to float actually on the waves of a sea of bliss in a balmy light that was like sunshine, but was distinctly something a million times more marvelous. I kept saying to myself, exultingly, 'I am free—I'm free!'"

"Go on—don't lose the trend!" Trimble urged. "It is fine—fine!"

"Ages seemed to whirl by. My ecstasy was beyond human comprehension. No mental or physical thrill for even a second of my life has ever approached it, and yet it seemed to have had no beginning and destined to have no end. Then I began to feel uncomfortable. A harsh, steady sound seemed to come from a great black cloud that I had not noticed in the distance and which kept spreading and rolling forward, over and under me like a vast thunderstorm. The sound, like

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the blows of a great hammer on a mass of jangling steel, was repeated every second. It was the ticking of the clock on the wall of the operating room, and I heard the harsh voice of the surgeon say, 'Give him some more!'"

"Ah! You were conscious again," the professor said.

"Yes, and the—the contrast seemed hell itself," Gramling resumed. "The sounds about me, the touch of hands, the smell of the ether. They told me afterward that I swore, struggled, and tried to get up, but was held down. Again the fumes burned through me. I remember that I sucked it in deeper, knowing that it had freed me once and wanting freedom again. I was soon afloat, and on feathery clouds and in balmy light. A gentle current seemed to be bearing me away from the cloud and noise. I wanted to shout, to sing, to laugh. Now here is what I've been leading up to. Out of the mellow glow ahead of me I saw my brother approaching."

"Your brother?"

"Yes, but—I'm tongue-tied again, Professor. I don't know how to describe him. I cannot say that he appeared to be in human shape—in fact, he was not. There was nothing material about him, and yet it was he. He seemed to smile with joy at seeing me. He spoke—I declare he spoke, and yet I'm sure that no sound, actual sound, came from his lips, if, indeed, he had lips. I wish I could make you understand,

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but when I try to recall the impression he made on me I find that it is a sheer impossibility. In rare moments the impression almost dawns on me, but the instant I try to grasp it it vanishes."

"But you say he spoke?"

"Yes, and seemed to embrace me. That, too, is indescribable. It was almost as if his spiritual essence had met and enveloped my own. He seemed to lift me from a reclining position to my feet. I could feel the—the very vibrations of his joy.

"‘It is glorious that you have come,’ he said. ‘I wanted you with me, and so I waited for you here on the border. They are all over there—father, mother—everybody!’ He seemed to point toward a brighter spot in the distance, and went on: ‘Come with me! I am to lead you. They asked me to stay there, but I refused. I will not go without you.’"

"‘Strange, strange!’ Trimble said, thoughtfully. ‘Well, what next? Keep to the line you are on. You are a splendid witness.’"

"‘We seemed to move forward,’ Gramling resumed. ‘The light and air grew more balmy, and in my brother’s company my joy increased. All about us I seemed to hear something like music—like it, and yet unlike it. My tongue is tied, Professor. I seem to know what it was, and yet to be unable to impart it to you.’"

"‘But you went on,’ Trimble suggested. ‘He led you on.’"

"No; I seemed to feel that my feet were

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becoming tangled in something like—like long, invisible moss or seaweed. Morten kept drawing me on, but my power to move seemed to be lessening. I seemed to hear him sighing, and he was growing indistinct, as if some sort of blur or mist were rising between us. His hold on me was relaxing. Far off I saw the same storm cloud again, and from it came the regular ticking of the clock.

“‘More—give him more!’ I heard the surgeon ordering. The shuffling of feet about the room grated on me. The hum of the streets, the sound of a distant bell, the escaping of steam maddened me, but only for a moment. Soon I was afloat again and on those waves of bliss. I saw my brother, too, but he seemed unable quite to reach me. He would approach, his arms extended, and then be borne backward as by some undertow. He seemed to be calling out to me, pleading with me to save myself, and saying that he could not get to me. Then I heard him sighing.

“‘It is not to be for yet awhile,’ he said. ‘You are to go back. The thread is not broken. I am free, but I shall not desert you. I’ll guide you and guard you. They tell me that I can do so.’

“I lost sight of Morten then. I seemed to be dropping, actually dropping through dark space that was filled with whirling objects and horrible clashing sounds, and then I waked in a bedroom at the hospital. Women in white caps and aprons, whose faces seemed somehow to be repulsively

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coarse in the garish daylight, bent over me. I can't describe them."

"The contrast again," Professor Trimble remarked. "Your experience is by no means new to a certain school of mystics. Were you nauseated?"

"Terribly, for a while."

"You certainly had a queer dream," Trimble said, "but as yet I see no actual bearing of it on your present mental depression."

"Wait. I have not finished," Gramling retorted. "I want to know what this means. I was conscious only a few minutes when the doctor came in. I noticed that he held a sealed envelope in his hand, and something told me that it was a telegram for me. I asked him about it and he said: 'You had better not try to attend to business to-day. You've had a successful operation, but your whole nervous system has been shocked and you need quiet and rest.'

"Then I surprised him and the nurses, for I told them that I knew what the message was about. My brother was dead. He had died while I was under the ether. It was as I said. Morten had been suddenly killed in an automobile accident between here and the city."

"Remarkable!" said Trimble. "Very remarkable!"

"I've sent for you to ask," Gramling continued, "if you think it could have been due to mere coincidence."

CHAPTER II

THE professor smoked in silence for a moment, and then he said: "In my investigations of phenomena for the Society of Psychical Research I have come to regard the vast mass of such experience as yours, which I have recorded, as of great value to science. It is possible, of course, that yours may have been only coincidence. But you, yourself, how do you feel about it?"

"I might have dropped it, but for something else that happened."

"Ah! it does not stand alone, then?"

"No," Gramling replied, "and the other thing seems to me to be even more inexplicable. I take long walks alone. One day, about a month ago, I had crossed over the Hudson at Yonkers and was walking back of the Palisades when I came to a farmhouse. A sign on the gate told me that fresh milk was for sale by the glass, and I went into the yard. The farmer's wife, a rather young woman, came out and directed me to a table in the shade of some fruit trees, and brought me a glass and a cool bottle of milk. I was drinking the milk slowly, and feeling very restful, when I noticed a child—a little boy of about three years

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of age, perhaps only two—playing with some lettered blocks on the grass near by. He was decidedly beautiful. He had long, golden hair and large, dreamy, brown eyes. I recall that he made a distinctly favorable impression on me, and I was vaguely drawn to him. I can't say that I am particularly fond of children, but, to tell the truth, I had almost a paternal desire to take that boy on my knee and fondle him. I called to him and asked him to come to me. He hesitated for a while, and then stood up, looked over his blocks, and selected one and brought it to me in his left hand. Mark that, please, Professor—in his left hand, while his right was held up straight above his head. He put the block down at my feet with the letter M on top. I tried to detain him, but he moved back to his blocks. Now mark this, too, please—as he toddled across the grass, his right hand was still raised. Again he stood looking at his blocks, and then, smiling over his shoulder at me, he selected another and brought it to me."

"In his *left* hand?" the professor asked, eagerly.

"Yes, and with his right raised as before. This time it was the letter O, and it was placed close beside the other. Professor, the process was repeated till the work MORTEN lay at my feet."

"You are now giving me something new—absolutely new," Trimble said, gravely, from his smoke. "You asked me to make note of the fact that the child kept his right hand up. May

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I ask if you attached any significance to the act?"

"A certain little thing made me do so," Gramling replied. "For once, as the child was going back to his blocks, he seemed to be struggling as if he were trying to lower his hand and was unable to do so. Then I distinctly heard him say, in his baby voice, 'Don't!'"

There was silence between the two men for a moment. It was broken by the professor.

"Was that all?" he asked.

"Not quite. I begged the child to bring me another block, but he wouldn't do so. He went to the gate, opened it, and stood peering out as if very interested in something down the road. His mother came to ask if I'd have some more milk, and, seeing her, the child ran to her, caught her skirt and tugged at it.

"'Man gone!' he said. 'Man gone!'"

"'No, the gentleman is still here, little goose!' the woman said, but the child pointed down the road and waved his hand up and down as children do in response to parting signals, and smiled. I don't think I ever saw a sweeter smile on a human face. It was simply angelic.

"'He is a queer kid,' the woman said. 'He is an adopted child—a foundling. We have no children of our own and my husband took him. He has strange dreams. We hear him laughing in his sleep in the night. He often comes in the house and says he has been playing with little

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boys and girls, and tells us silly stories about a strange woman holding him in her lap.’”

There was another pause. Trimble walked down the long shelves of books.

“You ought to put these books in order,” he said. “It is a costly collection—some rare editions, I see. Would you mind letting me see your brother’s books in the basement?”

They went down a stairway in the rear. The long room was dark, and Gramling turned on the electric light.

“There was Morten’s worktable,” he said, indicating a big mahogany table bestrewn with books.

Trimble moved along the shelves, scanning the titles of the books.

“I wish I could have known your brother,” he said. “I see he has most of my own favorite works here on occult subjects. I wonder if he read— But there is no index here, either, I presume?”

“None. He was always planning to have a catalogue made. But you have not told me—what do you think of the child?”

Trimble stroked his beard and smiled. “I’ll have to take you into my confidence to some extent. To begin with, you may know that the scientific world is not yet ready for the truth in psychic phenomena. Only a few scientists admit even telepathy to be a fact, and, to be candid, if it were known that I actually believe

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all that I do believe it would cost me my chair at the university."

"Are you intimating that you attach some supernatural significance to what the child did?"

"Between us, as men, I'll tell you that both of your experiences, tied to your close intimacy with your brother all your life, are of great value to me as a psychic investigator. I am a scientist. Even my severest critics admit that I am not led by my emotions or sentiment. I simply lay such experiences as yours before the most learned of them and ask them what they think they mean. I express no opinion either way. Some have said I deal with fake mediums. I do and I don't. I know, as everyone else does, that the world is full of such frauds."

"Then why do you have anything at all to do with them?" Gramling inquired.

Trimble smiled. "It is like this, Gramling. The subconsciousness of a human being is a wonderful thing. You may tap it through hypnotism, table rapping, the ouija board, automatic handwriting, or through a plain out-and-out liar. For instance, I've had a fake medium of the most flagrant type tell me five lies in as many minutes, and then reveal something astoundingly veridical—something she thought she was inventing, but which I have discovered to be a fact known to no living being."

"Then you *do* deal with mediums?" Gramling said.

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“Not the professional brand, as a rule,” the professor replied. “I don’t have to. A few months ago a man appealed to me for advice. He was a Frenchman of the laboring class, a paper-hanger who had done some work for me in my home. Contact with him there on several occasions gave him a sort of confidence in me, and one day he confessed that he was greatly disturbed over the mental condition of his wife, a young woman of the peasant class who had come with him to America. He said she was acting most strangely. Once he had fallen from a high ladder and hurt himself. He was unconscious for a while and was taken to a public hospital while in that condition. No one present at the time knew his home address, and so his wife was not informed of the accident. Notwithstanding this, she reached the hospital almost as soon as he did. She explained, so he informed me, that the spirit of her mother had appeared to her while she was washing clothes in the kitchen and informed her of the accident and where she would find her husband. Pierre—DuFresne was his surname—told me that many similar things were happening and that he was afraid his wife was losing her mental balance.

“I went to see her. She was not at all disturbed over her condition, said that she had been that way all her life, and that she was quite happy but for the fact that her neighbors were inventing lies about her and that Pierre was disturbed.

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The most ignorant said she was a witch and exercised a malign influence over them and their affairs. I made a thorough examination of her and was assured that she had a clear, logical mind. I found that she easily fell into a sort of trance condition, and I determined to test her psychic powers. She consented, but said that she preferred to make the experiment at night in a room as dark as it could be made.

"I agreed to this, and returned that night. To make my story shorter, I discovered her to be the most remarkable medium I had ever seen. I assured her husband that all was well with her, and made an arrangement with them for future tests solely in the interest of science. I have never paid them any money. In fact, to offer it would be an insult. He makes good wages, and, as she is industrious, they are never in need."

Gramling was impressed by the professor's recital. "Would you advise me to consult her?" he asked.

"I'd want you to use your own judgment about that," was the answer. "But I'll frankly admit that your particular case is one that I'd like to bring to her attention. Would you care to go there with me some evening?"

"I should like it very much."

"Very well, I have an appointment with her for next Thursday evening, and if that suits you we'll go."

"I'll be ready," Gramling answered.

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"It will do you no harm," the professor remarked. "You need a hobby of some sort, and this will give you something to do and may quite drive away your morbid tendency."

"Shall you speak to her of me in advance?" Gramling asked.

"No—not a word. That must be distinctly understood between you and me. When she is in her trance, I want to see if she will, of her own volition, make any mention of your brother. There is a thing that I must prepare you for, and that is this: when she speaks ordinarily she uses broken English, but when entranced she often speaks most correctly. It is one thing that convinces me of her genuineness."

CHAPTER III

THE house occupied by the DuFresnes was in the Bronx in a rather thinly populated section. It was a narrow frame building with two stories, which stood almost to itself in a vacant plot of ground surrounded by truck gardens and the scattered residences of laboring people.

It was eight o'clock when the two men reached the house and ascended the steps of the little stoop. Pierre, a short, stocky man, without a coat, met them at the door and invited them into the tiny parlor. Trimble did not introduce Gramling, but simply shook hands with DuFresne, and all three went in and took seats.

Sounds of clattering dishes came from the kitchen in the rear, and DuFresne said, carelessly: "Annette come soon. Some vimen stayed to supper, but dey gone home now."

Madame DuFresne, a woman of about thirty-five, inclined to heaviness, came in. She bowed to Trimble and looked inquiringly at Gramling.

"An intimate friend of mine," Trimble explained. "He is interested in my investigations. I wanted him to be present to-night."

"Oh, vair well." The woman shrugged her

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shoulders indifferently and sat down. Pierre rose rather awkwardly, mumbled out some excuse, and went to the stoop, whence soon came the smell of his pipe.

"Pierre no like to stay in," she said. "He's tired wid his work and he go to bed soon now. He work hard, poor man!"

After this the three sat quiet for several minutes. Then Trimble asked, "Do you feel like sitting to-night?"

"Oh yes, yes," she replied, and she rose, drew down the heavy window shades, closed the door, and turned out the light of the oil lamp. The room was quite dark now, and she felt her way back to her chair and sat down heavily.

Again there was silence. It was broken by Pierre's footsteps as he ascended the stairs to his room, and his wife's exclamation of impatience at being disturbed by the sounds he made.

"Ah, how it hurts—shocks, big noises—when I am like this!" she said, as petulantly as a spoiled child. "Pierre no understand—Pierre like all de rest—eat, drink, sleep—for him nothing more, but me—ah! what am I to say? Professor, maybe you understand?"

"Yes, yes, Annette, but get quiet again," he said, soothingly.

In a moment she had become more composed. Gramling heard her making little sniffing sounds through her nostrils and then she began to snore.

"She's off," Trimble said, "but I must rest her

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head better. She lets it fall forward and it impedes her utterance."

He got up, placed the woman's head in a more comfortable position, and then resumed his seat. "I sometimes lead her, a little," Trimble said, "but not often. She may talk to-night, and she may not say a word. It all depends on the conditions."

The woman was making no sound now; her breathing was regular and low. Twenty minutes of absolute quiet passed, then they heard her laugh out suddenly. Gramling thought that the rippling laugh was like that of a merry child at sport, and he was vaguely awed and impressed by it.

"Oh, mother dear, you are so beautiful in the sunshine to-day!" the sleeper cried out. "What do you want me to do? Tell him? Tell who? Oh, the strange gentleman—now I understand vair well—yes, yes—go on. Vot else? Oh, oh, oh!"

Her voice died away. There was silence for a moment, then Trimble said, softly: "What is it, Annette? What is wrong?"

"The man—your friend. Ah! Oh, oh, oh! Don't let him again. Stop him! He's good—he's nice. He mustn't do that."

"Mustn't do what, Annette?" the professor asked, softly.

"He waked in the night," the sleeper rambled on. "He was lonely in his great fine home—lonely because she—no, *he*—because he was no

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longer with him. It lay in a drawer—like—like a cold steel snake. He took it up and was about to do it, but the other—the one that left came to him and tried to speak—tried to make him see him, but failed. The thing dropped from his hand. He could not pick it up again—the other wouldn't let him. He filled him with braver thoughts. It was the only way. Ah, he is here now. He is new to the life—not so bright as the others who are farther away. 'Work to do yet,' he says it to me. I am to tell him."

"Tell whom, Annette?" asked Trimble.

"Why, the other—the—the—" Her voice died away.

"Tell whom, Annette?" gently persisted the professor.

"Your friend, the stranger."

"What are you to tell him, Annette?" Trimble continued.

"That he mustn't touch the—the snake again. He suffers, but it is best for him, and not for always. Those who kill themselves sink into vats of darkness and wander, blind men, among the stars which have no light."

"Who is the one who sends the message?" Trimble asked. "What is his name?"

"Name? Name? He can't recall it now. He says he had it, but it is gone like his baby play-things."

"Tell him to try, please," the professor urged, gently. "It is **very** important to us."

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"He says he can't now. He was able to do it once since he entered the great light. He says he taught it to a child and led him—led him—he can remember no more. It is all jumbled. He is sad—worried because his brother?—yes, his brother, is unhappy day and night, and he is trying to help him. He wants me to tell him—tell him—oh, I can't catch it—there are so many—many influences. Thousands want to speak, but he is the one I must hear first. Go away, please, all of you! Yes, yes, I'll tell him. I promise—"

She went no farther.

"Annette," Trimble said, after a grim pause, "you evidently have a message for my friend here. What is it?"

"Yes, yes, but I don't quite understand," the woman replied. "He says the gentleman—the stranger here—must change his life. The money, the great lonely house, is the grave. A beautiful life is ahead. There is useful work to do here in this life. One was to pass out, the other was to stay. It is written in—in—what is it? Destiny. Yes, I caught it."

"What would he advise?" Trimble inquired, softly.

"Yes, yes, I think I can remember," Annette was heard muttering in a low tone, and then she fell into silence.

"Go on, please, Annette," the professor said. "We are waiting."

"Yes, all right. Morten says—I don't know

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why I say Morten. He did not tell me—oh yes, it is from the old lady, his mother, and the other son is Hil—Hil—Hil—Hillery. Yes, this one here is Hillery, they say.”

“You started to tell us something this Morten said,” Trimble went on, softly. “Something he wanted his brother to know.”

“Ah yes! But he wants him to understand that there is no way to explain. He says I cannot get it through with my wooden tongue, and that I can’t fully understand him, either. His words—‘A sage cannot converse with a babe.’”

“He is on a higher plane,” suggested the professor.

“Yes, or rather more of the—the—the *light*, but it isn’t *light*. It is a million times finer than our light.”

“But do you get a distinct message, Annette?” Trimble asked. “You have better luck sometimes.”

“I know, but—but I’ve never met one so—so anxious before, and it is so important. A fine soul is in terrible despair, and he is greatly loved—so loved that his mate will not desert him. Ah, listen! He is speaking. He wants me to try to tell Hillery— Yes, I’ll try—slowly—slowly, please. Yes, yes, that’s easy. He must leave the big mansion. Lock the doors and—and—”

Annette broke off and was silent till Trimble roused her.

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"Annette, Annette!" he cried, gently, but firmly. "Go on, please."

"Yes, yes. Well—" she started and stopped again.

"Go on, Annette!" the professor urged. "You must get the rest."

"I know—I know," she resumed. "He is to leave the house, all his fine clothes. He must wear simple things like a poor workingman. He must change his name. He must go to the East Side and live among the poor. Take a cheap room. Morten will guide him to it. He is not to give away money—that is not the object. If he gives away money they will know he is rich and that must not be. Besides, the poor are God's favorites. The rich are under—under ban."

"Are you sure you are getting that right, Annette?" asked the professor.

"Yes, yes, sure, my friend. He is saying it—or thinking it to me, you understand? *Thinking* it to me. Somehow I feel it come. No words, but still I'm sure—East Side, as a poor man out of work. Yes, one looking for work, he is to say. He will be guided. Mor—Morten will be with him constantly. He can reach him there, but not in the great place. He says the light falls into simple lives." The woman was silent. She was breathing heavily.

"We'll have to stop now," Trimble said. "It is always over when she sleeps like that. Let's

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go. Pierre will come down and wake her after we leave."

The two men went out into the little hall. Trimble called out: "All right, DuFresne. Are you awake?"

"Yes, sir. I'll be down. Good night, sir."

On the walk to the Subway station Trimble suddenly asked, "Well, what did you make of it, Gramling?"

"I think it was marvelous," was the answer. "I don't know why it was so, but I was deeply impressed."

"By what she said?" asked the professor.

"Yes, and the way she got it out," said Gramling. "The genuine way she fumbled about for expression—now in poetic English, again in dialect. That's odd. I had a queer feeling. It may be very silly, but I almost felt at one time that my brother was actually there. Then, too, she knew my name and his, and you say you never mentioned me to her."

"No, she learned nothing from me," said Trimble, "but you must understand that I attach no particular significance to that. Sub-conscious mind reading is a fact. In my opinion, so far to-night we have had no proof of survival. We have made a fair beginning, that's all. We'll try again, sometime. What she said about your taking up your residence in the East Side was odd and I am puzzled over it. You see, Annette

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seemed quite positive about that and she delivered it in the firm way in which she has, in the past, given some of her most valuable instructions to me."

Later, as the two men were parting at the Grand Central Terminal, where Gramling had to take another train, Trimble said, with a smile: "Think over the East Side matter. Somehow it clings to me."

"I'll do it," Gramling promised. "Good night."

CHAPTER IV

ONE evening, a few days later, Gramling called at Professor Trimble's home.

"Glad to see you," the latter said, as he came into the little reception room. "How are you feeling?"

"Better," Gramling answered. "You've given me something to think about, and it seems to help."

"But you are still worried about something. I feel it in your hand," smiled Trimble. "You show it, too, in your restless eyes and manner. You may not know it, but you are excited."

Gramling avoided the eyes of the other. "I'm going to confess that Madame DuFresne's séance made a deep impression on me. Somehow I seem unable to shake it off. There are moments when it comes back like keen flashes of reality."

"She always affects me that way," returned Trimble.

"I don't know what to make of the feelings I have," Gramling went on. "Somehow, I have felt drawn to my brother's library in the basement, and I have spent several hours a day there since I saw you. I can't describe the sensation that

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came over me several times. I felt, however, that Morten or some strange influence from him was around me, wrapping me about, embracing me. The sensation was—was— But I can't describe it. I have no words suitable. It was somewhat like what I felt when I was under ether, and yet nothing was visible. By the way, something else took place that I want to mention to you. You have seen my man, Edward Strong, my butler?"

"Yes, he admitted me the other day."

"It was this morning," Gramling went on. "He was serving my breakfast in my room, as he did in Paris when he went over with Morten and me. He is not very communicative, as a rule, but this morning he had something to say and he seemed embarrassed over it. He began by timidly inquiring if I believed in dreams. I told him that I hardly knew whether I did or not, and he left the room for my coffee and came back. His hand seemed to quiver as he filled my cup. I asked him if he himself believed in dreams and he looked very grave. He forgot to put the sugar into my cup, and stood holding the pot awkwardly.

"‘I do, sir,’ he said. ‘My mother did. She used to tell me about many that came true. Last night I had a strange one, sir, and I don't know whether I ought to bore you with it or not.’

"I encouraged him to go on, and he did in a very serious tone. The night before, he declared, he had had a vision of my brother. Morten, he fancied, was riding a white horse and was himself

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dressed in white. He seemed to meet him on a great level meadow covered with grass and flowers, and Morten was trying to speak to him, but could not do so, owing to the horse's being restive and trying to get away. Finally, however, Strong said that Morten calmed the horse and bent down to him.

"‘I want you to speak to my brother for me,’ he said. ‘You can reach him, and I can’t. Tell him to obey the woman’s instructions—the French-woman. Be sure—don’t fail. It is important.’

"Then Strong said he waked, and found his pillow wet with tears, for he loved my brother."

"Strange enough, that," Trimble said, gravely. "What do you think about it?"

"I confess that it has kept me thinking. I did not let Strong know how I felt about it, but turned the subject off with some light remark or other, but I must admit that the whole thing is strange—almost too strange to be a coincidence."

Trimble was silent for a moment and then he said: "Has it occurred to you that— But I won't say it. I can't quite bring myself to advising a course so radical as the one suggested by Madame DuFresne. She has made some mistakes. She may be making one now."

Gramling smiled sheepishly. "What if I tell you that the idea clings to me tenaciously? It had hold of me even before Strong mentioned his dream, and now somehow the thought of such a change in my habits as that appeals to me. It

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seems to draw me. A way seems opened to me by which I can shake off a life of gloom for one of adventure—not material adventure, but spiritual.”

Trimble laughed softly and stroked his beard. “Annette has made many suggestions,” he said, “but never before one of such a radical nature. In a way it seems an absolute absurdity—asking a man of your position and habits to change his name and live as a poor man out of a job among the poor on the East Side. The truth is that I dislike to advise you, but—now I’ll make an honest confession, and that is that I am simply afraid you will not do it, and that one of the most interesting experiments I’ve ever started will fail.”

Gramling laughed sheepishly. “I want to do it,” he declared. “I’ve never in my life wanted to do a thing more. The very idea charms me. I feel as I used to feel when, full of anticipation, Morten and I would set out for a jaunt or tour together.”

“Well, your life, as it is, is not doing you any good,” Trimble answered. “And if I were you—yes, I can truthfully say that if I were you I’d do it—silly as it would appear to anyone else. Your friends needn’t know it. In plain clothes you could live in that quarter of the city and never be seen. But what would you do about your house?”

“I shall send Strong to my Newport home,” Gramling answered, “lock up the place, and leave

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it. I shall take only a single suit of clothes—the plainest one I have, and set out as soon as possible—the day after to-morrow, I think.”

“Good! It can’t harm you. You must keep in touch with me. What name shall you take?”

“Stirling—Thomas Stirling,” answered the other. “It is in my mother’s family, a great-uncle, I think.”

“That will do,” said Trimble. “Take my advice. Let your beard grow. It alters a man’s face. Throw away fine cigars—smoke a pipe. Don’t be too careful about the way you dress.”

“I understand,” said Gramling. “I’ll fall into it all right.”

CHAPTER V

THREE days later, at ten o'clock in the morning, "Thomas Stirling" left the Spring Street Subway station, a small valise in his hand, a slouch hat on his head, heavy boots on his feet, and walked eastward. His way took him through sordid, unclean streets which were thronged with the pushcarts of Hebrew peddlers, around each of which were packed rag-clad purchasers of fruits, vegetables, fish, meats, and household utensils. The nearer he got to the river the more squalor he met, and he began to marvel over what he beheld. How could human beings live like that? he kept asking himself, and was he himself to become an actual part of it?

At Pitt Street he came to a small recreation park. There were seats on the edges of the asphalt walks, and he sat down and looked about him. He told himself that the first thing to do was to get a room to sleep in. As for the locality, it was certainly sordid enough to suit his purpose. Across the street, facing him, stood a row of red-brick, three-story tenement houses in the lowest state of dilapidation, the ground floors of which were used for various businesses, such as a harness

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shop, a hat-cleaning place, second-hand furniture, a shop for repairing baby carriages, a rag-and-metal junk shop, a bakery the window of which was full of bread, and a laundry.

“Rooms to Let”—the sign was in a window of the top floor of a house directly in front of him. Gramling told himself that the place might do as well as any, and he crossed the street, entered the narrow doorway, and found himself at the foot of a flight of stairs, on one of the steps of which was tacked a placard reading, “Mrs. Mary Carr, one flight up. Rooms.”

The oilcloth covering to the steps was worn full of holes, and the loose, decayed planks bent and creaked under his tread as he went up.

A door, half open at the first landing, caught his eye, and he rapped on the shutter. A woman appeared. She was red-headed, middle-aged, and corpulent.

“Have you rooms to rent?” he asked.

She eyed him slowly from head to foot. “Only one now, sir,” she answered. “I can’t say that it is a very good one—it is a hall room at the back, top floor. I’ll have a larger one soon, but this is all now.”

“I am not at all particular,” he said. “May I see it?”

“Sure,” she said, and she came out and started ahead of him up another flight of stairs even narrower and darker than the first. On the landing was a heap of old boxes, a coal stove, some window

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sashes, and barrels of straw from which crockery seemed to have been taken.

"I shall have all this removed," the landlady said. "I have no place to put it just now."

There were four or five rooms on that floor, the doors of which were open. The room which was shown to him was a narrow one with but a single window. It contained an iron bed painted white, a washstand holding a chipped pitcher and bowl, a towel rack, a tiny gas stove for heating, a little table, and a rickety chair. It was certainly dismal enough. Gramling raised the window shade and looked out on the lots in the rear. Dirt and rubbish were everywhere. Ragged sheets and clothes hung from lines stretched from the windows to tall poles. Women and children sat in the cramped yards, some at work sewing, others nodding as if asleep. Now and then a man appeared, always without a coat and sometimes without a shirt, for the day was warm and little air was stirring.

"The price is two-fifty a week," Mrs. Carr informed him, with another dubious glance at his well-fitting clothes. "I'm afraid it is not good enough for the likes of you."

"Oh yes, it is good enough," he answered. "I did not expect to get any better."

"Then you are—are out of work?" Mrs. Carr said, sympathetically.

"Yes," and he nodded. "I am, just at present."

"So many are," she sighed, deeply. "I can

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see that you are not used to this sort of thing, sir, and I hope you will have a change of luck."

He found himself unable to say anything and was silent.

"Oh, I run across a lot of trouble, first and last," she went on. "I have some people with me now who are terribly hard up."

There was a sound on the stairs. Someone was coming up and seemed to pause in the middle of the flight. Mrs. Carr went to the landing and looked down.

"Is that you, Miss Lingle?" she called out.

There was no response. "Are you faint, Miss Lingle?" Mrs. Carr called again, and then Gramling saw her start down the steps hurriedly. Fearing something had happened, he went to the steps and glanced down. The landlady was supporting in her arms a young woman who was ghastly pale.

"I'm all right now, thank you, Mrs. Carr," said Miss Lingle. "I think I was faint. I've walked too much to-day in the heat. It is very, very sultry."

Gramling went down the steps and met them. "May I help you?" he asked, in deep concern.

A look of sudden surprise passed over the young face which Gramling now noted was refined and even beautiful. Her eyes were deep blue, her hair brown and wavy, her hands small, white, and tapering.

"Thank you," she said. "I am all right now."

"You might open her door for me, if you will,"

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Mrs. Carr suggested. "It is the one next to the room you were looking at."

He complied, and saw that the room was as small and bare looking as the one he had been in. A small trunk stood at the window, a few soiled dresses hung on the wall, a pair of tattered shoes lay near the washstand. Seeing that the window was closed, as the air was stifling, he went into the room and raised the sash. Turning, he met Mrs. Carr with the young woman on her arm.

"You are making too great a pet of me," Miss Lingle said, now forcing a sickly smile. "I'm not worth it. There is nothing wrong. I had one of those spells the other day, and the doctor at a drug store told me that I was all right—only fatigued."

She smiled gratefully at Gramling as she passed into the room, and again said, "I thank you."

He went into the other room, where he was soon joined by Mrs. Carr.

"I'll take the room," he said. "It will suit me very well at present. I'll leave my valise here and go out for a while."

She accompanied him to the street door. "I shall be glad to have you here," she said. "I see that you are a gentleman, and I have some rough people with me. Some of the men on your floor play cards and drink at night. I hope they won't disturb you."

"Oh, I'll be all right," he said. "How did you leave the young lady?"

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"Lying down, resting," was the answer. "Her case is pitiful, and a mystery, too. Do you know what ails her? Starvation, pure and simple. She is too proud to accept food from me. She is behind with her rent and on that account refuses to eat with me, though I have asked her several times. She is out of work, too. When she came here last winter she had a lot of nice things—two trunks full, but she has since sold or pawned them all, piece by piece."

"You say she is a mystery?" Gramling asked.

"Yes, I've never been able to make her out. She is a lady—there is no doubt about that, sir—every inch of her. She is having secret trouble of some sort. I have an idea that she has enemies. She sometimes seems afraid of being recognized. She nearly always wears a veil when outside, and I've seen her start when she heard the doorbell. She has never told me where she was from, and from her accent I am sure I can't tell whether she is English or American."

"Do you think she is actually hungry now?" Gramling asked.

"Yes, but what can a body do about it? She declares she is not hungry whenever she is asked. I've had her refuse things I've taken up to her, although I saw her eyes glistening like a famished animal at the very sight of them."

Gramling went out and roamed about in the sordid streets. He had the sense of being in some foreign place secure from contact with anyone

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who knew him. At sundown he was back in the recreation park on a bench facing the house he was to live in. He marveled over the change in himself. In his great, lonely home he had been morbidly miserable, but now already he was filled with a queer repose which was enlivened by a sense of expectancy. He laughed. What would the average conventional human being think of a man's doing what he was doing? And at the behest of what? The advice of a laboring woman who claimed to be in touch with the ghosts of people.

"Silly, silly, silly!" he said, and yet there were the other experiences—the vision under operation; the spelling of Morten's name by an unknown child; the dream Strong had had, and Professor Trimble's grave view of the whole matter as bearing on scientific research.

Gramling's walk had made him hungry. He had eaten nothing since a late breakfast, and he now looked about him for a place to sup. And to his surprise he found himself actually more interested in the cheap restaurants in the street than in the most fashionable places he had ever frequented. That he was to live like a very poor man in every way appealed to his imagination. Seeing a window opposite with the words "Delicatessen Lunch Room" on it, he crossed over. On one side of the little room was a counter holding bread, cakes, ready-cooked meats, and tall coffee and tea urns where two men and a woman were

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serving. The room held a number of small tables at which men sat with their hats on, many of whom smoked pipes as they ate. As Gramling sat down, keeping his hat on, there being no place to hang it, he noted the ham and roast beef which the woman was carving, and as a man in a white apron was bending over him he ordered some ham and eggs and coffee.

They were brought to him on a thick plate and in a massive cup and saucer, accompanied by a knife and fork and teaspoon, the original silver plating of which was worn almost off. The men at the tables were speaking Hebrew, and Gramling could not tell what they were talking about. However, the novelty of the whole thing appealed to his fancy and he enjoyed it. He enjoyed the lights, the food, the faces about him—the odd sense of freedom from something he could not define.

Suddenly a thought flashed on him. Annette, the medium, had said that Morten would be with him and would guide him in his new life. Was his brother with him now? And was Morten's presence the cause of his unwonted content and delicious sense of dawning adventure?

Paying a few cents for his supper, the cheapness of which was a revelation, Gramling went back to the recreation park. It was thronged with people seeking the open air. Women sat on the benches nursing babies, larger children played in the playground where there were swings and other

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mechanical arrangements for the amusement of the young. He saw no vacant seat, and strolled about till he was tired—so tired that the thought of his bed was inviting. So he went up to his room. It was only nine o'clock and yet he was ready to retire.

The stairway was dimly lighted and he managed to reach his room without trouble. The window was open and from the rear he heard voices. Looking down, he saw the back yards filled with the inmates of the houses sitting out for the air.

Gramling undressed and lay down. The bed was hard and lumpy, but he didn't care. "It is part of the game," he said, with a smile.

Presently he heard steps on the stairs. They paused at Miss Lingle's door and there was a rap. Gramling heard the key being turned in the lock and the rusty hinges creaked.

"It is me, Miss Lingle," said the landlady. "I've brought you some chicken broth and tea."

"Oh, thank you, Mrs. Carr," came back in the musical voice which Gramling had already admired, "but I've already had my supper."

"I don't care if you have, my dear"—Gramling heard the heavy tread of the landlady entering the little room and the sound of something being placed on a table—"you are not getting the sort of diet you need. This broth is rich and good, and you know you liked my tea."

"You are really too kind," came in soft, protesting tones. "This can't go on, Mrs. Carr. I

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am getting deeper and deeper in your debt, and you can't afford it. You could easily rent my room."

"I don't want to," was the quick answer. "Here, you take this broth. I know a thing or two about health, and I know that you will be sick in bed if you don't eat more."

"Eat more? Why, I—"

"You are not getting enough," the landlady broke in. "I will have my way this time, Miss Lingle. I'm going to sit here and make you eat. That's what I'll do."

Gramling heard a sweet, yielding laugh. "I'll do it to please you, then, Mrs. Carr."

Twenty minutes later the landlady went down. Some men clattered up the stairs, talking loudly, and went into one of the rooms in front. A door was slammed. The odor of bad tobacco and whisky floated on the air. It was very warm and close, but Gramling felt tired, restful, and drowsy, and was soon asleep.

CHAPTER VI

A PLEASANT week ensued. The very routine of his daily life was agreeable. As soon as breakfast was over he always started out on his strolls of exploration among the poorest people. His beard was growing, and his face was changing in appearance. In one of the recreation parks every afternoon groups of young men met and had discussions in a sort of open-air forum, and Gramling enjoyed their talks and the almost intimate contact with some of them. Many were young Jewish students of socialism, and Gramling heard his own class soundly berated as the useless, idle rich, who were obstructing the true progress of humanity. There was a public library near his room, and there he often read the books his new friends approved of and found that the process was expanding his view of life. Now and then he broached the subject of psychic research, but found little interest in it among the persons he met.

One morning, as he was about to go down for his breakfast, he saw Miss Lingle leaving her room. She was in advance of him, but he caught a hurried glimpse of her profile in the darkened corridor,

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and saw that she was pale, thin, and wore a worried look.

“Poor thing! Perhaps she is still hungry,” Gramling said.

He allowed her to keep ahead of him, though her step was very slow, and saw her pass out at the front door and turn down the street. At one of the cheapest bakeries she entered, and as he went by the door he saw the attendant passing a single small roll of bread over the show case to her in exchange for a penny. She was out in the street in a moment, and Gramling, unobserved by her, watched her as she entered the recreation park and took a seat on one of the many vacant benches. Gramling went on and had his breakfast and came back.

She was still on the bench, and daintily eating the roll. As he came up close behind her he saw her picking a few crumbs from her dark dress and putting them into her mouth.

Passing around the bench she occupied, he sat down on another bench adjoining it. She did not see him, for she was now closely reading the help-wanted page of a daily newspaper and with a pencil marking certain advertisements it held.

Suddenly she looked up, caught his sympathetic glance, recognized him as her neighbor, faintly smiled, and slightly inclined her head. He longed to speak to her, but felt that she was giving him no encouragement to do so, as she at once resumed her reading and marking of advertisements.

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The playground was open and numerous children were entering it and noisily disputing over the swings and basket-ball arrangements. A little girl in a soiled and tattered dress was swinging rather high, standing on the seat of the swing and supporting herself by holding on to only one of the ropes.

"Get down from there!" a policeman near Gramling called out. "Do you want to break your fool neck?"

Hearing him, the child sank down in the swing, made a defiant grimace at him, and continued to push the swing to and fro with her feet.

"I know that kid," the policeman said to Miss Lingle, who was watching the little girl. "She fell from a fire escape the other day. She was fooling with the clothesline."

Miss Lingle smiled over the top of her paper, but made no comment, and the officer walked out of the park. Gramling was studying her face. It struck him as being extremely sad in repose and there seemed, in her long-lashed eyes, a sort of dull, hunted expression. Presently he saw her watching the swing again. The child had risen to her feet and was recklessly propelling herself higher than ever, to the great amusement of an applauding group of children, balancing herself with the skill of an acrobat. Presently the seat shot out from under her feet, the clutch of her frail fingers gave way, and she fell in a heap on the ground. Miss Lingle uttered a startled

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scream, and both she and Gramling ran to the child's assistance.

He reached her first and found her unconscious. He raised the child's head, but she simply lay limp and apparently without life.

"Poor thing!" Miss Lingle cried, kneeling beside Gramling and gently stroking the pale, clammy brow of the child. "Where does she live?"

"Right across the street, back of the laundry," a boy with a tennis racket and ball answered. "She's Kitty Quinn."

Just then the little girl opened her eyes, took a deep, lingering breath, winced, and forced a dogged smile. "I'm all right," she declared. "Ike Einstein pushed me. There he goes, sneaking pup!"

Gramling helped her to rise, but on starting to walk she uttered a scream of pain and sank down again. Miss Lingle felt of her ankle through the ragged brown stocking, and then, looking into Gramling's face, she said. "It is broken. I am quite sure of it. Let me— Could you carry her to her mother?"

Gramling had already decided to do this, and, taking the little girl in his arms, he and Miss Lingle started across the street. The pain must have been severe, for, with a whimper in his ear, she fainted again.

He mentioned it to his companion, who was close at his side, and she said: "Yes, her eyes are closed. Poor child—poor, dear child!"

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They had to pass through a narrow, dark corridor by the laundry and finally reached a dismal-looking doorway to which they were piloted by the boy with the ball and racket.

"Mrs. Quinn! Mrs. Quinn!" he called out, rapping vigorously on the door frame with his racket.

"Here I am. What's the matter wid yer?" came in a shrill, querulous voice from the interior. "What yer beating on my door for?"

"It's Kitty, Mrs. Quinn," the boy answered. "She's fell and broke her leg."

The woman swore under her breath. "I've been looking for it," she cried. "You dirty brat, didn't I tell you not to—"

"She is unconscious, Mrs. Quinn," Miss Lingle said, gently. "Please, please be kind to her."

"Oh, I don't know what I'm doing, miss," the woman said, opening the door wider. "Her father's lying in the kitchen now—he's full of booze for a week. We are out of food. He sold my shoes that was given to me. Come this way."

Through a passage that was so narrow that Gramling had to walk sidewise with his burden she led them to a dark, ill-smelling room with but a small window. It contained two beds which were disarranged and filthy in appearance.

"Here, put her here— Oh, my God! what am I to do? If her leg is broke she'll have to have a doctor, and he won't come to us now, for he hasn't been paid for the last time when he stitched

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up Jim's head after the scrap in the Bowery with the cops."

"Never mind, I'll get the doctor," Gramling said, as he lowered the little girl to the bed indicated.

When her head touched the pillow she opened her eyes, saw her mother, and began to cry. "Oh, don't beat me, mumsy!" she whimpered, her dirty lips twitching with pain. "Ike Einstein shoved me."

"Who said I'd beat you, silly lump?" sobbed her mother. "Don't you see I'm all in—drudging night and day for this, when my father owned six trucks and twenty horses, all his own, in his time. Miss, I'm tellin' you no lie."

"I'll get the doctor if you say the word, sir," said the boy. "I know where he is—his office is right around the corner."

"Yes, bring him, please, at once," said Gramling. "Tell him I'll be around here and see him."

Gramling and Miss Lingle followed the boy out into the street and saw him darting away, his racket and ball still in his hands.

"Awful, awful!" she said, as they reached the bench she had sat on. "I never knew that people lived like this till—till I came here myself."

She sat down and took up her paper. He felt that she would not object, and sat down beside her. "I'll watch for the doctor from here," he said. "I must speak to him. That child needs other things besides a mere bone-setting."

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"And you expect to pay for it, when you yourself are—are—"

"Are what?" he inquired, mystified.

"Are out of work?" she said, with a little shrug.

"How did you know that?" he asked.

"Mrs. Carr. She means no harm by talking about her roomers. She is sorry for us all. She likes you especially, and she mentioned it only out of sympathy for you. I'm sure she must have mentioned my ill luck to you."

He smiled and made no denial.

"I think the doctors here get two dollars a visit," she said. "You must let me pay part of this bill. You see, I got you into it—we are partners in poor Kitty."

He looked at her sweet face in sheer wonder over its rare charm and the strange and buoyant effect her words had on him. Never had he felt so drawn to a woman before. He smiled.

"Let you pay part?" He laughed. "Never!"

"Is it because you think I am—am unable," she faltered, her pretty lips twitching. "It is true I haven't the money *now*, but I shall get work again soon, and—"

"You shouldn't pay if you owned a bank," said Gramling, firmly. "I ordered the doctor of my own accord." He was about to say more, but checked himself. He told himself that he must guard his secret and play the part of a poor man as well as possible if he was to give his strange

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experiment a fair test. "I am not at work just now, it is true," he went on, "but I am not absolutely without funds."

"I know," she said, sympathetically, "but you can't deceive me. I've seen you at those tiny eating places, and I know that if you had means you'd not live where we do."

He shrugged his shoulders, at a loss for further words on the subject. She was silent for several minutes, her eyes on the advertisements she had marked.

"Isn't life terrible—in *the flesh*, I mean?" she said, looking straight at him.

"Yes, but—why do you say, 'in the flesh'?"

"Does that sound odd to you?" she asked, gravely, seeming to search his face as she spoke.

"Well, yes, rather," he answered. "You see by the use of the words you imply that there is another life aside from the flesh."

"That is what I meant," she went on, as if she were saying nothing unusual. "If there were no life outside of the body, living in the body would not be so terrible. The only thing I can't comprehend is why we are so imprisoned. Ah! I detest the—the dungeon I'm in! Yesterday I crossed the Hudson at the One Hundred and Thirtieth Street ferry and walked along the Palisades at the water's edge. Oh, it was heaven! The sky was so blue, the clouds so soft and white—the water so full of life and music—the people so clean and

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happy! It seemed to me that they all smiled at me, as if their souls saw my soul through its covering. I loved them all. Men had their wives and children with them and made fires on the shore and cooked their meals. Lovers and their girls strolled up the hillsides and sat on the mossy rocks or rode in canoes, their hands trailing in the water. They sang—they shouted."

"But they were in their bodies," Gramling said, smiling.

"Perhaps, but I wasn't in mine," she declared. "I swear that I could not have felt as I did if something supernatural had not happened to me. I forgot my dingy room and these dirty streets. The night came on before I realized it. I would have missed the last boat for Dyckman Street—I had walked all that way without the slightest fatigue—if a policeman had not ordered me to leave the shore."

"She is very strange and wonderful!" Gramling mused, as he watched the supernal light in her exquisite face. The din and clash of sordid commerce was all about him, the cries of push-cart peddlers, the clanging of a junk wagon's bells.

"You are giving me something to think about," he said. "It is lovely to think of the possibility of our living outside of matter. In talking to you I realize my own—imprisonment."

"Kitty is in her jail, too," Miss Lingle said. "That is why she is so reckless and swings so high.

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The wings of her soul lift her, and she forgets her fetters. I think I already love that child. As her white face lay against your neck just now I longed to kiss it, dirt and all, kiss it, and thus reach the real Kitty beneath."

Miss Lingle glanced toward the street. "There is the boy with the doctor now," she added. "Setting bones is painful, isn't it? Poor Kitty! Her flight was short and high-priced."

"I'll run over and speak to him," Gramling said. "Will you come along?"

She shook her head and smiled ruefully. "I must look for work," she said. "I must visit some people this morning. I'll be turned down as usual, I presume, but I'll try."

He had risen, and she now stood up. Something fell from her lap. It was a tiny leathern purse. He bent and picked it up. It felt as if it contained no bills, and only two or three small coins.

She flushed as she took it. "My car fare," she explained. "I need very little."

She turned away, and he crossed the street to see the doctor and his patient. A vast elation was on him. He told himself that he would see his interesting neighbor again, and that they were to be close friends he did not doubt. How oddly she seemed to fit into his recent spiritual experiences! There was something supersensual and dreamlike about her. Physically she was beautiful, but her real beauty lay deeper than that, and as yet he could not grasp it in full. It

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was transcendental—intangible beyond human analysis.

He chuckled and smiled. What a rare and beautiful adventure he was having! Whither was it leading? Where would it end?

CHAPTER VII

GRAMLING was in the recreation park the next day, reading a newspaper, when he suddenly felt rather than saw a man seat himself by him. Hearing a low laugh, he looked up. It was Professor Trimble.

"So here you are, you grisly hobo!" the latter said. "I got your note. I was over at your joint just now and the landlady said Mr. Stirling was out looking for work. This is an ideal way to get it, basking in the sunshine like a lizard on a fallen tree. Your Mrs. Carr tried to find out if I had anything for you to do, and when I told her I did not she seemed disappointed. She is a good soul, but not psychic. Well, I have no excuse for coming, Gramling, other than that I am wildly interested in your quixotic experiment."

"It is interesting me," Gramling answered. "I have never found anything I liked better."

"And you show it," Trimble declared. "You are a different individual. You've got the blood of life in you, and your beard—well, it is becoming and has altered your looks—that and your clothes. But don't misunderstand me—when I speak of your experiment I mean your supposed

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connection with your brother. Now, here is where I stand. I have been to see Annette twice since I saw you, to carry on some experiments, but both times you have broken it all up."

"I? What do you mean?" Gramling stared in surprise.

Trimble smiled. "Well, what I mean is this. Annette simply will not get down to work as she used to do, for the reason, she claims, that your brother is continually persisting that he must reach you."

"Reach me? That's interesting," Gramling said. "I assure you that I have not lost interest in that visit of ours. To tell you the truth, I often feel, somehow, as if Morten were with me. I dream of him at night. He is always happy, and always trying to help me."

"That is interesting," Trimble said. "Well, the upshot of the matter is that I have made an arrangement for us to see Annette to-morrow night, if you can spare the time. Could you meet me at the Grand Central Terminal at seven o'clock?"

"Easily enough," Gramling replied. "I'll be there without fail. Now, I want you to do *me* a favor."

"Name it, old man," the professor said, smiling.

"A little child living across the street fell and broke her leg the other day. Her people are very poor. I have put some money into this envelope" (Gramling took an envelope from his pocket), "and am trying to find some way of getting it to

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them without being known in the matter. Can you help me?"

"Nothing easier," laughed the professor. "There are dozens of ways. Simply give me the name and address and I'll attend to it. I left my car in the care of my chauffeur around in the next street. I'll let him drive me up to the door, and have him take your gift in as if it came from some wealthy settlement worker. Will that suit?"

"Perfectly. Your idea is a good one."

"Now, listen," Trimble said. "I've let you tell me about this matter, but you must tell me no more—just now, anyway."

"Oh, I see, you want—"

"To note if Annette touches on anything that has occurred to you here. It will be an interesting test of her powers."

The two friends parted, and a few minutes later, while Gramling still sat in the park, he saw Trimble's car stop at the door of the house Mrs. Quinn lived in. The colored chauffeur got out and went in at the basement door. In a moment he returned and, without even glancing in his direction, the professor was driven up the street and out of sight.

Gramling went up to his room. He was seated with the door open to obtain a better circulation of air in his cramped quarters when he heard Miss Lingle coming up the steps. Seeing him, she smiled somewhat eagerly, he thought.

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"I dropped in to see Kitty," she said, panting a little from her ascent of the stairs and the warm weather.

"Yes? And how is she?" Gramling asked.

"Doing very well"—Miss Lingle smiled—"that is, as far as the broken bones are concerned, but the whole family is in a tumult of excitement, and the neighbors as well. It seems that some rich man drove up in a splendid car just now and left fifty dollars for Kitty's benefit. Mrs. Quinn is out of her head with delight. She has made a dozen guesses. She used to know some wealthy persons, but she can't imagine how they could have heard of her latest trouble."

Bewildered and abashed, Gramling had nothing to say about the money, but managed to ask, "What success are you having?"

"None," she said, a frown and a smile blending on her face. "They turn me down everywhere. You see, they ask for recommendations and"—she broke off suddenly—"I mean that—that—oh, I may as well own to the truth, Mr. Stirling. There are reasons why, just now—why I cannot—why I'd *rather not* give references."

"That is nothing," he tried to comfort her. "You shouldn't mind."

"It is more serious than one would imagine," she said, thoughtfully. "I don't know why I've confessed this to you, Mr. Stirling, unless it is because you yourself are out of work. You have been very kind to me, too, and I appreciate it."

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We are strange ships that pass in the night, aren't we?"

"I should not like to think that we are to pass quite," he said, with an impulsive boldness which surprised him. He had risen and was standing in the doorway of his room, close to her.

"Yes, yes, of course"—she smiled sadly—"and yet it is inevitable."

"Inevitable?" he repeated. "That is a harsh word, Miss Lingle."

"Yes, but you don't know—you can't imagine the—the toils around me—yes, toils. I cannot explain—I never shall be able to explain. Somehow I trust you as I'd trust a dear brother, and yet I shall never be able to—to tell you who and what I am."

"I have never thought of asking for any explanation," he said, earnestly. "But there is one thing I want—and I want it very much, Miss Lingle. I want to aid you."

"Aid me?" she said, wonderingly, her dreamy eyes probing his face.

"Yes," he continued, boldly. "You need money. You are hungry even now. I know it—I feel it. Pardon me, but you show it in your face. You are thinner than you were. You are injuring your health, overtaxing your strength."

She shifted her eyes from his; the color rose in her cheeks. She laughed evasively. "I am doing very well," she faltered. "You are very, very kind to be concerned about me."

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"But we mustn't drop it here," he ran on, trying to lift her glance by the sheer sincerity of his own. "I want to lend you some money."

"I couldn't think of it," she said, letting her eyes sweep the cell-like interior of his room. "If you had had money to spare—to lend, you'd never have come here to live. No, I must fight my battle and you yours. We are both unfortunate, that's all."

"But I have it to spare," he insisted, "and I cannot keep it and see you suffer as you are suffering."

The pink glow on her face, the mild glitter in her eyes, the faint sigh she gave betrayed her deep appreciation. "I can't possibly accept help from you," she said, "but I shall never be able to show you how grateful I feel for your offer. You, like myself, have seen better days, Mr. Stirling."

He faced her. In his grim determination to have his own way, and the great surge of tenderness for her, he all but felt like taking her hand and drawing her forcibly to him. "Tell me, please, what you've eaten to-day. Tell me," he pleaded, as a rightful lover might. "Tell me!"

She smiled. Her sweet lips quivered like a thwarted child. It was plain to be seen that she liked his tone and manner.

"How persistent you are!" she said. "But I am not resentful—really I am not."

"Tell me. I want to know," he went on.

For answer she went to her washstand, fetched

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a little paper bag to him. It contained half of a small penny roll of bread. "There were two like this," she said. "I ate one and a half."

"And expect to peck like a bird at this now?" he said, bitterly. "Do you know that you can't live on bread and nothing else? You need milk, eggs, and meat."

"And so do *you*, sir," she retorted, half playfully and quite defiantly. "You are a strong man, and men require more than women. I never was a great eater. Do you know that the simplest diet of bread or rice actually heightens one's spiritual qualities? Have you read of the Hindu philosophers of India—how they subsist on a few grains of rice and attain such wonderful psychic powers? To tell you the truth, Mr. Stirling, I myself have my most remarkable spiritual experiences when I am living abstemiously. There are times when I do not seem to want food. When my emotions are deeply stirred or I am frightened I do not care to eat."

"Frightened?" he said. "Are you ever frightened?"

She avoided his stare of inquiry. Shrugging her shoulders, she evaded an answer.

"Are you really ever frightened?" he repeated, in deep concern. "I know you are alone and unprotected, and this house has some rough characters in it. Do the men at the other end of this floor bother you?"

"Oh no," she said, impulsively, now giving him

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her eyes again. "In a way they are a—a protection. I can't explain quite, but they are. They treat me respectfully. They lift their hats when we pass on the stairs. Do you know I've thought that if I ever actually needed them and called on them for help they would give it without a moment's question, and I may need their help, and yours, too, some day. I can't say any more, Mr. Stirling."

"I can't ask for your confidence," he faltered, in his deep sympathy.

"But something is due you from me," she said. "I may as well tell you that—that I have been pursued and may be pursued—actually pursued again—traced down and found."

"You?" he cried, aghast.

She nodded. "Yes, I have enemies. I am innocent of wrongdoing, but if my enemies could find me they would have even the legal power to arrest me. You can't imagine what my life has been—how full of torture and terror. Now you see why I can't give references to help me get employment. Would you believe it? They are searching for me in every city in America. Here I feel safer than anywhere else."

"And there is no way that I can help you?" he asked, desperate in his sheer pity.

"None, Mr. Stirling. If I find work I shall be all right—that is the main thing now."

"What kind of work can you do?" he asked.

"Anything with a pen or pencil. I write a clear,

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rapid hand—they all say that. For six months I worked in a public library in Philadelphia. I did it well, helping with the indexing of the books, but all at once—well, I had to leave in the night, without my pay, at that. I went to Boston, got a position as private secretary to a fashionable woman who delayed about asking for my references because she was busy with some big functions, and when she asked for them it was all up with me. I could have lied, Mr. Stirling—I could have told her that I had lost my letters, but I could not do it. I simply cannot lie. Something inside of me tells me a lie is a weak and cowardly thing. I believe there is an infinite law of some sort governing all things and all people. I believe that everything I am going through is for my own good, and I must not try to lighten it by lying or being untrue.”

“You have a beautiful faith,” he said, admiringly.

“I have to have it to live.” She smiled sadly.

Suddenly he took the piece of roll in his fingers and pressed it.

“It is as hard as a stone,” he said. Then under a strong impulse he tossed it through his open window. “You are going to a restaurant with me,” he said, almost in a tone of command. “Come now—I am hungry and I need your company. You have no idea how lonely I am. I need you.”

Her suffused face and gleaming eyes betrayed

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the fact that she vaguely liked what he had done and said. "You are a great tempter," she faltered, tremulously. "I want to go. I'm hungry; yes, I'm hungry, and I'll go if you will let me select the place. I think I know one cheaper than any you've found. It is run by an old Jewish woman who seems kind to me."

"Any place to be with you and see you eat something," he said, fervently. "Come, let's go."

CHAPTER VIII

SHE had not removed her hat, and without delay she turned down the stairs with him. The restaurant was a tiny nook behind a vegetable stand in one of the side streets. It contained only two small tables, the cooking and boiling being done somewhere below. An old woman with a wrinkled face and bent body came in. On seeing Miss Lingle she smiled.

"Oh, it you—mees!" she exclaimed, warmly. "You been away, mees?"

"No, not out of town, Mrs. Steinbach," Miss Lingle responded, sweetly. "Only busy."

"I t'ought you was seek maybe, perhaps, already, and bei a doctor in de hospital. You looked seek de last time you had my soup." She beamed on Gramling, and added: "She no eat enough, meester, she die. She nice girl, but she too proud."

"Yes, we must make her eat—you and I, Mrs. Steinbach," Gramling said. "Have you some good rich soup now?"

"*Ach ja!* in a minute, *mein Herr*. Lamb stew—fine. *Ach*, you have right! She must eat a plenty—*nicht?* I no ask her fer de money,

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mein Herr. I see; I understand. My own dochter, twenty years old, tried to find de job for long time. Yes, yes, I understand—and dis lady! Look bei her hands, *mein Herr*. She no sweatshop worker. She die now. See how black de eyes.”

“She likes you already,” Miss Lingle remarked, as the old woman shuffled away. “People take to you. Mrs. Carr did at once, and this kind old soul, and—and I, myself, have talked to you as I never thought I could talk to any man. I think I understand it—you have suffered. You are still suffering.”

“I never was so happy in my life as I am now.” He smiled across the white oilcloth. “I never knew what it was to be happy till I met you.”

“You can’t be in earnest,” she said, tremulously, against her will.

“But I am,” he declared, “and I’ll remain so if—if you’ll only let me feed you back to health. You mustn’t let your pride take you too far. I realize how you feel with a stranger like me, but then I know how I feel, too, when you are hungry and making yourself ill.”

“It is hard to keep to rules of pride with you,” she said, with a rare smile. “You make me feel almost as if I am doing you a favor instead of it being exactly the other way about.”

A reply trembled on his tongue, but he failed to make it, for Mrs. Steinbach was coming with two steaming plates of soup.

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"Now, coffee or tea—which?" she asked.

It was coffee for them both, and well made, after the French method—black with hot, creamy milk. The rolls served were warm from the oven of a near-by bakery, and the sweet butter was of the best.

Gramling was not very hungry, having enjoyed a late breakfast, but he made a valiant attempt to appear so. How exquisitely beautiful was the face opposite him! The hand which pushed the spoon from her was as delicately pink as the inside of a sea shell; the fingers were tapering, the nails carefully manicured.

"Now, some fine fresh fish?" Mrs. Steinbach suggested, when the soup had been consumed.

"Yes," Gramling said, "by all means."

"But I assure you I've had quite enough," his companion declared.

"Fish is a very light diet," Gramling argued. "It will be good for us both."

She made no further protest, and Mrs. Steinbach went below. The narrow street roared and clattered outside, full of squirming human life. They leaned slightly toward each other, their eyes now and then meeting in silence. Gramling was in a dream of delight. That he loved her he no longer doubted. He loved her for her calm, patient dignity in her troubles, for her rare beauty of face and mind. Suddenly she sighed.

"You must think strange of me for accepting attentions from a stranger," she said, "but I

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cannot help it. I haven't had a friend for years, and you seem so—so unselfish and kind and—and in trouble, too. That is it; I'm sure—that is what broke down the barriers between us. Like myself, you seem isolated, alone in the world, and lost here in this mass of unfortunates."

"We must be friends always," he was emboldened to say. "I want to help you. I care for nothing else now—absolutely nothing else."

Her violet eyes, melting with strange depth of sincerity and concern, met his squarely. "You mustn't let yourself be *deeply* interested in me," she said. "It wouldn't be fair to you. I wouldn't say this, but sometimes you hint that you really are beginning to care for me, and it must not be that way. Your temperament takes disappointments gloomily, and I must tell you that if I were your sister I'd not want you to—to care for a girl situated as I am. That is, if I knew who and what she is and was."

"I can't ask you to confide in me," he answered, "but I want to say that there are no imaginable conditions that could render you less dear to me. Whatever your trouble is it is no fault of yours, I know. I beg of you to use me. I'll never be content unless I can help you."

"No one can help me." She sighed. "And as for our continued friendship, even that is impossible for any length of time. Listen, Mr. Stirling, there is never a day that I do not fear will be my last in my little room adjoining yours. I may

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be found any day and taken back to—to—well, to something worse than death. Oh, I can't bear to think of it! I mustn't. I would go mad or—or try to end it all."

He winced in sheer pain as he looked into her sad face.

"You can't imagine how this hurts me," he said, tremulously, his voice catching in his throat.

She lowered her head and raised a white, blue-veined hand to her brow. "I wish it didn't," she said. "Every girl wants to be liked, but I do not want you to suffer through me, and you would some day. I am not the mate for any man alive. My existence is too precarious—my chance of escape too remote."

He would have answered, but Mrs. Steinbach was coming with the fish. Miss Lingle ate all her portion, he was glad to note, and when they had left the little place they walked around to the recreation park and sat down on one of the benches.

"You must not throw me over," he said, huskily. "I shall follow you to the end of the earth if you leave me."

"You don't know—you can't understand," she faltered, "and, unfortunately, as much as I trust you, I cannot explain. Since you feel as you do, I must prepare you. I may have to leave at any moment as I've left other places. You are already having enough trouble of your own without being entangled in mine. You couldn't help me anyway—no one could."

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She rose to go. "I have a visit to make." She smiled. "An old merchant on Broadway wants a private secretary. He will be very gracious and polite till he asks for references, and then he will stare in doubt and shake his head. That is my luck always."

CHAPTER IX

THAT evening when Gramling and Professor Trimble reached the house of the DuFresnes Pierre was on the little stoop.

"Annette ready," he said, rising, his hot pipe in the palm of his calloused hand. "She in de dark now—asleep, I think, already."

The parlor was densely dark when they entered it. Trimble closed the door and felt about for a chair, which he gave to Gramling. Finding another somewhat nearer the sleeping woman, he sat in it. There was silence for several minutes. Then Trimble called out, sharply:

"Annette! Annette! What do you see?"

"See? How could I tell you dat?" was her answer, uttered with difficulty, owing to the position of her head.

Trimble rose and put her in an easier position.

"Now," he said, "that is better. What do you hear, Annette?"

"Hear? Why, your rough voice, snarling, screaming, bellowing like a driver of mules. It pulls me to earth and lashes me. Ah! Ah! What beauty all about! The sky—the blue—the music—the thought, that's it, the thought! There is a

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great, round, black spot, and in its very center I see letters like diamonds burning their hearts out. They spell, 'Go seek thy soul's mighty call—if thou wouldst know where hangs the *light*—and thou wilt find *love!*' ”

“Pretty, very pretty, Annette,” Trimble said, encouragingly. “Is it meant for any one in particular?”

“For all searching, despondent souls in the universe,” came from the sleeper. “It seems to be written on a dead, black planet whirling through space. Ah, they come crowding to get to me. I am ‘the gate,’ they say. A beautiful gate, indeed—a fat, red-faced woman sleeping like a cow in a chair. And yet they say I can do it; they say I can understand the things they think to me and that I sometimes tell them to those still in the dark. Ugh! I wish I could get out of that body! Why should I live with an unclean man with a pipe, when they say I was with them once and as free as they? To be a mouthpiece, yes, I was sent for that. Who? Who do you want? Yes, he is here again with the professor—this time a beard. Yes, I’ll tell him if I can.”

Here suddenly the sleeper’s voice sank so low that the two listeners could not catch what was said.

“Annette,” Trimble said, sharply, “what do they want to tell my friend?”

“I know, Professor,” Annette answered. “I know—I seem to have the knowledge in me, *on*

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one side—do you understand?—but I can't somehow fill it into my body. I fill it in sometimes, but the beastly, cud-chewing tongue can't be made to work. It wants to rot and die back into freedom. Yes, I'll tell him. I know, you are the same that spoke before—Morten. I know you. You are as beautiful as ever, because you love—love—the one with the beard so much. Who is the one with you?

“He says it is a friend, Professor—one he met there in the—the glow of—of the eternal. Morten wants Hil—Hillery—that's it, Hillery—he wants Hillery to know that he has been with him all along there among the poor as he advised. He gives me see a little park, a falling child, a beautiful woman—ah, so beautiful, because she suffers and is oppressed and hunted down like a beast of the jungles. The other loves her—Morten's spirit friend loves her for years till he died and broke her heart. He and Morten, hand in hand—you might say—guard over those two in their little rooms, and try to get work and money for the proud, hungry one. But they fail, always they fail. Men are so suspicious.”

Annette fell into silence, broken only by her harsh, laborious breathing. Suddenly Trimble spoke:

“What is the name of the new friend—the spirit friend, Annette?”

“Name? He tries to remember. Names slip off like putrefying flesh and skin. He seems

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mystified—he had forgotten that he even had one—ah! now he gets it by remembering how it looked when he wrote it as a little boy once in school on a blackboard! Ashley—that's it—Ashley is the first name, but the other he can't get. He knows that there was another, but it is—is—behind the clouds. Ah, these two friends are close ones indeed, both bent on a common purpose—to lift two souls from despair!"

"And will they succeed?" the professor asked, softly.

"They don't know. They are afraid. The sleuths—the enemy's agents are paid high. Active, too. Morten and this Ashley see it all and try to thwart it. Beautiful spirits—these two. The music, the glow calls to them. It is theirs, but they refuse to—to melt into it—'*Melt into it!*' they think those words to me. You know, Professor, that my poor peasant's brain could never use words like those. Morten was a student of books. He is apt in his talk. His thoughts radiate and warm all who catch them, like famished plants drinking sunshine with all the pores open."

"Is Hillery to remain where he is?" the professor asked, eagerly.

"Yes, to aid her. He may fail, but he must try, and, food—ah, how glad they were when he threw the dry scrap of bread from the window and was so firm with her! It was bread cast upon the waters, too, for a hungry child picked it up

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the next day and ate it. They make me see him how—a drunkard's child all covered with mud and soot. He crams it into a mouth where teeth are missing."

"Do you see anyone else on the East Side that Hillery knows?" the professor inquired, adroitly.

"Yes, the woman of the house. Kind, loving—a friend. Another, an old Yiddish woman bending with the soup and broiling fish in a dark place—good, kind, and gentle—suffered much in Rumania—saw two sons drown in a storm at sea. They are here—I see them as I speak, far away. They don't believe I am 'a light,' as the others call me here. Ah, the beautiful one at this moment weeps in the little room. An old man at a desk told her that if she were honest she could have recommendations aplenty. It stung—it hurt her pride. He was rough, blunt—insulting."

Silence again. Annette was breathing heavily.

"I think that will do for to-night, Annette," Trimble said. "Now, don't sleep here longer. Pierre says you are hard to wake after I leave. Get up now and go to bed."

"It is over." Annette in a raised voice seemed to be speaking to someone aside. "I am tired. Some other time—all of you—you brave, bright ones, and you scowling, mischievous plotters who don't know you are dead. Go! go!"

As the two friends were leaving the house they heard her ascending the stairs.

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"Ah, your pipe—how it stinks, you pig!" they heard her complaining to her husband, who was patiently aiding her on the way up.

"I'm curious to know," began Trimble, as they walked away, "if she said anything remarkable to-night. It was all Greek to me."

"Many things," said Gramling. "There is such a young lady as she described, and in some peril unknown to me. She is out of work, too, and in great need. She was to see an old man this afternoon. I know something of all the things Annette mentioned except this Ashley."

"Perhaps a lover," suggested Trimble. "It would be interesting to follow that up. There is something fine in the idea of your brother and a lover of hers uniting in an effort to aid you and her. This is an interesting case, Gramling. I am absorbed in it."

"So am I," answered Gramling, and then to himself he said: "A lover—yes, she may have had one, and he's dead. That is one reason she is so sad."

"Trimble, can you help me in a particular thing?" Gramling suddenly said, pausing and facing his friend. "Do you know of any way in which employment could be found for this lady? You see, she cannot give references."

"There you certainly have me." The professor laughed. "It is a hard question indeed. So that's the case with the lady you met?"

"Yes, for some reason that I don't care to

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probe, for she is unable to show letters of recommendation. She is the soul of honor. Her secret reasons are her own, but she must find employment in spite of the difficulties."

"I'll think it over," Trimble said. "I'll help you if I can—though you'll admit that it is a ticklish proposition. How can you or I recommend anyone not recommended to us unless we have known the individual for some time ourselves? How would it do to furnish her with money, anonymously if she is too proud to take it otherwise?"

"I've thought of that, but it could not be done. You see, she is being hunted down by enemies. If anything were to come to her she'd be alarmed. I think her name is an assumed one and she would wonder how anyone but me would know her address. I can't tell her who I am, and that I have means, you see, after the lie I've told concerning my own condition. Besides, she'd never accept help from me, anyway. She is the proudest creature you ever saw."

"And beautiful, really?" Trimble said.

"Yes, beautiful, Trimble—beautiful of mind, soul, and body."

"I see; you needn't tell me more," said the professor. "Of all the romances I ever heard about, this is the strangest. I'll take your intuition for her standing and will try to think of some way to help her find work, but it will be difficult. What kind of work can she do?"

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“She says any sort of writing. She worked in a public library and liked it till she was forced out. I think she’d like to work where she would not be seen by many people.”

Half an hour later, when Gramling reached his room, he saw a gleam of light under the shutter of Miss Lingle’s door. It was ten o’clock. He heard her moving about. A trunk lid went down; the lock clicked; he wondered if he might dare to speak to her through the closed door, and at least say good night, but he refrained from taking such a liberty. He wondered if Annette could have been right in saying that she was weeping alone in her room that evening.

It was two o’clock before he went to sleep, so busy was his mind with the things he had heard and experienced that evening.

CHAPTER X

THE next morning when he was up and dressed and had opened his door he saw Miss Lingle coming up the stairs with a brown-paper parcel in her hands. She smiled.

"You haven't had your breakfast yet?" she said.

"Not yet," he answered.

"Well, don't leave till I call you," she said. "I may keep you waiting a few minutes, if you don't mind."

"Not at all; I am in no hurry."

He sat down and waited, wondering what she could want. In a few minutes she opened her door and looked in on him.

"I have a surprise for you," she said. "Would you think it possible that I have prepared breakfast for us? Will you come in?"

Wonderingly, he followed her into her room. On the washstand stood a small portable gas stove for light housekeeping, and on it rested some cheap metal pots and pans from which steam was issuing. Against the wall stood a tiny table covered with a spotless white cloth, on which rested two knives and forks and plates and cups and saucers.

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"Mrs. Carr brought them to me yesterday," she said. "A poor artist who has just left had them in his room. They are just what I wanted."

"Fine! Wonderful!" Gramling exclaimed.

"Well, bring your chair in and put it opposite mine."

He obeyed, his heart pounding with sudden joy.

"Now, sit down, sir. I heard you say you liked eggs and bacon for breakfast with warm rolls and coffee, and I have them ready. But first we are going to share a grapefruit."

She put the daintily prepared fruit down on the table and sat facing him.

"I am simply speechless with delight," he said, sincerely, as they began to eat. "Ah, how much better this is even than Mrs. Steinbach's little cubbyhole!"

The grapefruit eaten, she got up and busied herself preparing the coffee and other things. The bacon and eggs were just right, the coffee the best, with rich cream from a tiny bottle; the rolls which she had gone for that morning were just from the oven; the butter was firm and cold.

"I didn't think it could be done in a room like this," he said. "You are a wonder."

"We used to do it in Paris," she answered.

"So you've been abroad?" he said, wonderingly.

"I was born in Rome," she said, it seemed to him a little reluctantly. "I went to school in Florence and Geneva both. Later I lived with some girl students of art in the Latin Quarter of

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Paris. I know something of Germany, too—but not so much.”

“That explains something about you that I could not understand,” he answered, his eyes on her face. “It is your odd pronunciation. It is a quaint, charming mixture.”

“I’ve been told that I speak queerly.” She smiled.

“What luck did you have yesterday?” he ventured to ask.

“Ugh, awful—awful!” She shuddered. “I don’t like to think about it. I’ve been treated roughly before, but never as I was by that old brute. He seemed to be a sort of old-fashioned Presbyterian. He actually crushed me with his scorn and contempt when I told him I could not give him references. Why, for a moment I thought he was going to have me arrested. I gathered that he had once been robbed by an adventuress who worked in his office long enough to learn the combination to his safe, and left with a lot of money. He was in a towering rage. I was so frightened that I could hardly walk away, for he spoke of me to the store detective. Told him to watch me. I fairly ran to a car. I rode far uptown and sat in a park till night. It was only my imagination, but I fancied I was being followed, and was afraid of being arrested and questioned by the police. It was nine o’clock when I reached my room and went to bed.”

“And then you cried,” Gramling put in.

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"And you heard me," she said. "I tried not to disturb you. I covered my head with the sheet."

Gramling made no explanation and, wanting to avoid the subject, he remarked, "You must have loved those early days in Europe."

"They seem like heaven now," she sighed. "My brother was alive then, and he and I were inseparable. He was the most beautiful boy in the world. I had no desire to live when he died of the fever in Venice one summer. Father and mother were not there—they were in Egypt, and could not be reached in time. I was alone with him there among strangers, in an old palace which had been converted into a hotel. I nursed him night and day. Then the doctors said they had given up all hope. It stunned me. I couldn't understand. I couldn't realize that he was leaving me. Just before his death he sank into a sort of stupor, and when he suddenly came out of it he looked at me with the clearest eyes, as if he had all his mental faculties about him.

"‘Sister dear,’ he said, ‘I’ve had a vision—a glimpse. There is no such thing as death as we understand it. I am passing from your view, but I shall always see you and be with you.’"

Miss Lingle's voice shook with welling emotion, and Gramling sought to divert her mind. "Shall you look for work to-day?" he inquired.

"Yes." She inclined her head wearily. "There are two places I want to go to. This time sweat-

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'shops. I think I could run a sewing machine, making waists or overalls. Besides, if I'll work cheaply enough they may not push me for recommendations, and I am ready to work cheaply enough, you may be sure."

She filled his cup with coffee again and put in the cream.

"You ought not to have done all this," he protested. "I don't want to seem unappreciative, but—"

"And you think I did it?" she broke in, with a merry laugh. "Well, sir, I didn't, and I am not going to take the credit for it."

"You didn't do it?" he said, mystified.

"No, it is a combination donation breakfast to you from three new friends. Mrs. Steinbach proposed it. She took a strong liking to you, and declares you are starving. She furnished the eggs and bacon, Mrs. Carr the coffee and cream, and I the rolls and butter—so there you are. Mrs. Carr likes you, too. She brought up the gas stove and the utensils, and here I am getting the benefit of your popularity, for I am eating fully half of the royal spread."

They laughed together now, and when they had finished eating they remained at the little table, their heads bent close together. Presently she said: "Do you remember the piece of a roll you threw out the other day? Well, this morning, just after I got up, I looked out of my window there and saw it lying on the grass of the lot just

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back of this one. There were some pigeons pecking about, and I was hoping they would find it, when a little ragged boy came from the basement door and frightened them away. He was the dirtiest, thinnest child I ever saw, sunken-eyed and spotted with scabs and sores. He saw the bread and pounced on it like a starving dog on a bone. Oh, it was terrible the way he ate with his clawlike hands and nails!"

"Was that this morning?" Gramling asked.

"Yes, just before I went out for the rolls."

Gramling made no further comment, though he was determined to tell Trimble of the circumstance as bearing on Annette's powers of foresight.

They both went down the stairs together that day and parted in the little park. "I can hardly hope that you will succeed," he said, a manly sympathy in his tone and glance. "Work of that sort is not for you. We must really look for something else, something lighter and better paid."

CHAPTER XI

HAVING nothing to do, Gramling went to the library, where he read a book on psychical phenomena for an hour. Then he went back to the park and sat down. He had become fond of being in the mass of poor people and half fancying that he was as destitute as they. They were all about him now, benches full of aged Hebrew women and men. The men were unoccupied, save for chatting one with another and reading Yiddish newspapers, the women attending children, sewing, or knitting. Presently Gramling saw Professor Trimble entering at one of the gates, and he went forward to meet him.

"I hoped I would find you here," Trimble said, smiling. "I wanted to see you for two reasons. The first is to discover if Annette the other evening said anything that you have since found out to be true."

Gramling led him to a bench somewhat more retired than the others. He spoke of the circumstance of Miss Lingle's rough treatment by the merchant to which the medium had alluded, and the incident of the boy and the bread.

"Good evidence—that last particularly," Trim-

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ble said, reflectively, "for Annette, you see, laying aside the chance of coincidence, was truthfully predicting something which had not taken place. She has never done that before, and it will be a great help to me. Many mediums read minds, but this goes beyond mind reading. It is prophecy. But that other thing. The name Annette mentioned—Ashley—do you know anything about that?"

Gramling shook his head. He went on to speak of Miss Lingle's education in Europe and casually mentioned the death of her brother while there.

Trimble steadied his eyes on his friend's face. "Did she mention his name?" he asked.

"No, she did not."

"We must follow that up," said Trimble. "I remarked the other night that Ashley might be a dead lover. I afterward thought he might be her husband, and now I am inclined to think that Ashley was her brother."

"Her brother!" Gramling's spirits rose as he echoed the words. "Why had he not thought of that possibility?"

"Now the other matter that I came to see you about. Has the lady found work yet?"

"No."

"Good—all the better. Now I flatter myself that I have landed the very thing for her—at least, so it seems to me."

"Are you forgetting the lack of references?" Gramling put in.

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She won't need them." Trimble smiled significantly.

"Why so?"

"Because she is to work for you."

"For me?"

"Yes, through me—listen. You said she knew something of library work, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, you remember telling me at your house that you had intended to have an index made of that great mass of books you own? Well, your mysterious friend shall do the job."

"But she wouldn't accept—in fact, I do not want to let her know that I own such a place. I couldn't face her after the part I've played, and—"

"She need know no more about you than she does now," smiled the professor. "She thinks you are looking for work, also, doesn't she?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, then, I've fixed that, too. I'm a sort of detective, I do believe." Trimble took a letter from his pocket and extended it. "I typed that myself. I didn't dare turn it over to my stenographer, who has a woman's natural curiosity. That letter would convince her that I am leading a double life. Some poet says that a woman scorned is a man scorched—but I tell you that a woman on the outskirts of a mystery is the most dangerous thing in the world—to the mystery. Now all you've got to do is to show this letter to

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your new friend and it will lie for you. I assure you that it is a masterpiece of its class."

Deeply mystified, Gramling read as follows, written under the home address and over the signature of Trimble:

MY DEAR STIRLING,—According to my promise, I have been looking about for some suitable employment for you and I think I have something that may not displease you wholly. You may know that, poor as I am myself, I happen to have a few influential and wealthy friends. Now, one of them, a certain Mr. Hillery Gramling, who is a bachelor, owns a fine old house on the Hudson, Oaklawn, ten or fifteen miles out of town, and he has just left for Europe, to be gone a year or so. Now he has not only secured my promise now and then to look in on his house to see if all is safe, but he put into my charge a matter which he wants attended to before he returns to this country. It happens that he has quite a large library in the house, and he wants to have a classified catalogue of the books made, as well as an up-to-date card index. Your mention of the fact that you had some lady friend who was also out of employment leads me to think, as you certainly will need one or more persons to assist you, that this lady might accept a position under your guidance. I think you said she had once done work of this sort.

Now I myself have seen this collection of books, which fills two large rooms, and I am sure that the work will consume at least six months of your time—so that you and the lady could count on regular employment for the period mentioned, anyway. I believe I remember your saying that you were renting a room at your present address, and, in that connection, I want to add that Mr. Gramling would consider it a special favor if any friend of mine, as you are, would live in the house while he is away. There are plenty of furnished rooms and, as he left hurriedly, it is in apple-pie order. You told me once that you were fond of light housekeeping, and you could amuse yourself most substantially in the big kitchen.

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Now as to payment, I don't see how we can have any trouble about that, for it is this way: Gramling has a habit of actually throwing money away—burning it in wads, you might say, and so he simply left the question of expense with me, with a lot of signed blank checks. Now I am going to say that I consider work of this particular nature worth as much as any brain work going, and I am certainly not willing for you to be underpaid. I have, in my own mind, fixed the very lowest figure at, say, seventy-five dollars a week for you and fifty a week for an assistant. I hope all this will suit you and the lady you mentioned, and, if it does, kindly come to see me at once and I'll give you the keys to the house, written directions as to how to get there, and a month's pay in advance for you and your assistant. If the work is acceptable I advise you to make free with the house. I personally authorize you to occupy it as your own, entertain there, give parties, use the bedrooms, drawing-rooms, dining room, kitchen—in short, make it yours for the time.

I am posting this. Please let me see you soon, saying that you approve of my idea.

Cordially your friend,

HENRY TRIMBLE.

“Well, what do you think of it?” the professor asked, laughing.

“It is wonderful—wonderful,” Gramling answered, “if only we can make it go. It is just the thing. It would be a good hiding place for her, since she has to hide. The only thing I don't like is that she is to get less than I do.”

Trimble laughed again.

“It had to be that way,” he explained. “She'd smell a mouse, otherwise. She would wonder over it a lot, anyway.”

“I don't like that feature of it.” Gramling shook his head and frowned darkly. “She is

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skilled in the work, and I know nothing about it."

"Well, try it out this way," Trimble said. "I have a most fertile brain, young man, and I could fix a little thing like that as easy as falling off a log, if it had to be done."

"How?"

"Why, I'll write you another masterpiece in which I'll inform you that your old job with the Thingum-a-jig Trust Company of Wall Street wants you back at twenty thousand a year, but that I hope the library work won't be halted and that your assistant will be willing to continue it alone on, say, double pay. But take my advice, old man, let well enough alone. You will want to be about the place, and you'd not have a good excuse otherwise. Yes, let it stand. In fact, as your friend and employer I'd have the right to drop in once in a while, and I'd like to meet the lady. She will need someone to do the rough work, and a man ought to make a good janitor on seventy-five a week of his own money and in his own house."

"Well, let it be," Gramling said.

"Then set to work at once. When shall you see the lady?"

"Not before to-night, perhaps."

"Then be ready for her. Tell her you have already been to see me and accepted the job for you both. Go to your bank in the mean time, get some cash, hand her two hundred as her part

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of the first month's pay, and take her to Oaklawn to-morrow morning—no, not then, not in broad daylight together. You are too well known at the station. People would bow and speak to Mr. Gramling—then it would be Mr. Groveling, eh? How's that—not bad, eh? It came right out. She would leave you at once, wouldn't she?"

"No, she mustn't discover that," Gramling said, unsmiling. "Then how would you go out?"

"Ah, I have it," Trimble said. "Tell her I am to send my car at ten in the morning. My man will take you in my closed, wet-weather car and deliver you on your own grounds without being seen by a soul."

"That's very, very kind of you," Gramling said. "Well, I'm off to the bank."

CHAPTER XII

IT was growing dusk. Gramling sat in his little room, the door of which was open, waiting for Miss Lingle to return. She was later than he thought she would be, and he was growing uneasy about her. Presently he heard her on the first flight of stairs and went to the landing and looked down. She was moving slowly, her white hand on the railing, as if she were very tired or faint. On the landing just below him she paused. He saw her wiping her brow with her handkerchief and distinctly heard her sigh or softly moan.

"Are you ill, Miss Lingle?" he found courage to ask.

"Oh no—thank you, Mr. Stirling!" She seemed to start. "I'm all right, only tired. I've been on my feet all day."

He regretted that the stairs were too narrow to admit of his aiding her to ascend, and waited till she finally reached him.

"As usual," she panted, with a swift, sad smile. "No work for me. They all laughed at me. One kind old Jew let me try a machine, but lost patience—said they were too rushed with orders to take pupils. Oh, that workroom was awful!

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Those women and girls are worse than beasts of burden! Beasts of burden have the open air and sunlight. These people grind in reeking dungeons. It would have killed me—simply killed me. It was that and all the rest that caused me to—to— But how can I tell you? And yet I want to tell you. Of late I want to tell you all my troubles. You seem to be the reincarnation of some true friend of my past. Yes, I want to tell you—to make an honest, straight-out confession to you. Will you come in and sit down?"

Surprised over her unwonted tone and abject manner, he accepted. She lighted the gas and stood near the window, removing her hat and veil. Several times he heard her sigh. Presently she sank down on the edge of her bed. So grave was the situation that he saw no chance to tell her just then of the position which was open to her. Moreover, deception of any sort seemed out of place in the presence of the profound perturbation which swept over her, and in the plans he had laid there was much to be hidden.

"Have you had anything to eat?" he asked. "Had we not better go out and get something now?"

Raising her hands to her temples, she uttered a little moan and shook her head. "Not while *this* is on my mind," she said. "I must confess it to you. I think I am hungry, or was, but this drove it away. I only feel faint, like an invalid. Mr. Stirling, I've done wrong—I've been weak.

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For many months I've felt strong, able to battle against adversity, but about an hour ago I gave way. O God! I hope it was only an impulse, and not the result of my reasoning in any sense!"

"What is it?" he asked, deeply concerned.

"I had been to all those places," she began, slowly, "those awful shops, and had given up all hope when I reached the Astor Place Subway station to start here. I went down to the platform. There was a seat against the wall, and as the train I was to take had not arrived I took it. Few persons were in sight, only the man at the ticket box, I remember. The close air of the tunnels oppressed me. I thought of this dismal room, of all I have been through and what was ahead, and a wild thought flashed through my brain. It was suggested by my noticing how swiftly the express trains dashed along their tracks. Something told me that I could easily spring across the local line and—and—"

"Oh, don't! don't!" Gramling cried out. "I know what you mean!"

"I couldn't help it, Mr. Stirling. For a while I only thought, somehow, of the coming train's being a kindly thing that would grind my body to pulp and release me—me—the real me! I saw that I must act without taking time to reflect, and so I closed my senses to every other thought. I got up and looked into the long tube. I heard the rumble and saw the lights of the train. I was not afraid, not one bit afraid, and had no

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sense of wrongdoing. I planned how I would spring down just at the right instant to the local track and dart across it to the very center of the other. I looked about me. No one was on the end of the platform near me. I recall the weird thought that fate had aided me for what I had to do. I went to the far end, close to the wall. I thought the right instant had arrived. I think I prayed—I am not sure, but I think I said, ‘Forgive me,’ or, ‘Have mercy on my soul,’ or something like that. I was ready. I was calm. I was never calmer in my life—never less fearful. I was stooping down, intending to use my hands to ease my weight down to the track when—when— How can I tell you, and make you comprehend me? A stranger, a young man, suddenly came from somewhere—really it seemed out of the tube itself, for the platform had been empty. He came, caught my arm, drew me upright and away from the track’s edge.

“‘You must not!’ he said. ‘That would be very, very wrong. It would pain him.’

“‘Pain who?’ I asked, faint, dazed, bewildered.

“‘Ashley,’ he said. ‘You have been brave till now. Don’t weaken. He couldn’t come, so I took his place.’

“‘I couldn’t speak. I can’t describe it. I’m unable to find suitable words now. It seems like a dream rather than a reality.

“‘Here’s your train,’ he said, and I heard it coming. ‘I’ll help you on. Go home. Bad as

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it seems, it is better than the darkness you would have plunged into.'” Miss Lingle stroked her eyes with her white hands and sighed again. “He led me in at a side door of the last car. I remember feeling conscious of his hand on my arm in a gentle pressure. A few persons were getting out, and he and I waited for them to pass. Then the strangest thing of all happened—the very strangest, Mr. Stirling. He entered the car with me, but on looking about I suddenly missed him. Mr. Stirling, I missed him. I could no longer see him, though I can swear that I still felt his hold on my arm.”

“How strange!” Gramling exclaimed.

“But that wasn’t all,” Miss Lingle went on. “I not only felt him holding my arm, but I knew that I was being led to a vacant seat across the car, and I distinctly heard his voice—the same voice. I felt his breath on my cheek as if he were bending down to my ear.

“‘Good-by,’ he said, or something said: ‘Good-by. Don’t give way again. Your trials are hard to bear, but they must be borne.’”

“And was that all?” Gramling asked.

“Yes, and there I sat dumfounded till my station was reached. I feel that it was both real and unreal. I can’t remember now what he looked like. Have you ever noticed that you can’t recall when awake faces met in dreams? I feel that way about this stranger. I feel that he was handsome, gentle, loving, tender—everything!

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And yet— But what is the use? I can't express what is in me. It comes and goes in the oddest way. One instant I feel that I know what he looked like, and the next the impression is gone completely. But of one thing I am sure, and that is that whoever he was, or whatever *it* was, has made me feel that I ought not to give up. In the oddest way I feel somehow protected from the outside. I failed dismally to-day, but maybe to-morrow I'll succeed. I shall hope so. I *already* hope so. But you, yourself, tell me— have you found anything to do?"

He started. He was unprepared for the question and shrank from the white lie he had planned to tell her, and yet there she sat, waiting for an answer to her question.

"Yes, I've struck something," he said, trying to speak lightly to veil his embarrassment. "It came rather unexpectedly in the mail to-day. It is from—from a close, personal friend, a man of influence with whom I talked recently. You know I told you I'd see if I could aid you to find employment also, and this, in a way, includes you."

"Includes me?" the girl exclaimed, and stared wide eyed.

"Yes, Miss Lingle. I took the liberty of mentioning you to this friend, and he promised to keep both of us in view. This letter of his is the result. Please look it over. It explains everything. It seems all right to me. I hope it will strike you favorably."

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She took the extended letter and, wishing to avoid meeting the frank gaze of her beautiful eyes while making misstatements, even in her behalf, he went into his room, leaving her standing under the gas jet reading Trimble's adroit conceit.

He sat down in the dark and waited. He heard the rustling of the typewritten sheets of paper. Then, after a pause, he heard her rickety chair suddenly creak, and knew that she had taken it. All was still then. Would she suspect the ruse? It was not likely, for she evidently regarded him as being as unfortunate as herself. And why shouldn't she believe that he had influential friends? Indeed, she had told him she knew that he had belonged to a different walk of life from the one in which she had met him. But why was she delaying? Why was she so silent? She must know that his door and hers were open and she had but to speak to be heard. He wondered if he ought to go to her now or wait longer.

CHAPTER XIII

PRESENTLY she came to his door, the letter in her hand. Her face was flushed, wrung with suppressed excitement, her eyes twinkling and dilated.

"It is too good to be true," she faltered. "Oh, it would be lovely, lovely! and the money— Is it possible that anyone, even a rich man, can pay you and me that much by the week?"

"It is important work," Gramling answered. "Oh, that part will be all right! What do you think? I have already closed the deal. I saw Professor Trimble to-day—since I received the letter, and—and accepted."

"Already? And is it settled?"

"Yes, and"—Gramling smiled lightly as he took from his pocket an envelope containing bills—"here is your first month's pay in advance, two hundred dollars. I cashed his check at once. In the future payments will be made by the week."

Miss Lingle took the money and held it tentatively in her white fingers. His chair was near the door and she sat in it. "I am not afraid we can't do the work all right," she said. "It is the sort of thing I love to do above all other

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work, but I am still in the dark about a certain thing."

"And what is that?" he asked, fearful of he knew not what.

"Why," she replied, "what about my references to this Professor Trimble and the owner of Oaklawn?"

"Oh, that amounts to nothing." Gramling threw it off lightly. "Trimble does not require them. I told him you were a friend of mine and that was enough. He would never dream of asking questions. He and I are friends of long standing."

"Oh yes, between you two it may be all right," Miss Lingle said, quietly, "but I can't accept as it stands, Mr. Stirling."

"But why?" he asked.

"Simply because you, yourself, know nothing of me. I can't impose on your good nature to such an extent. No, no"—as if to herself, her head lowered—"I couldn't do that, after all your kindness to me. I have a habit of looking ahead, and you must not run the risk of being involved in my affairs. It might ruin your chances for the future. I am in danger of—of being taken any day, and any association you'd have with me would be apt to get into the papers. No, you must not soil your hands with me and my unfortunate life."

She had not opened the envelope. She moved as if about to hand it back to him. He was filled with the fear that, after all, he would be unable

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to carry the plan through. "But you are forgetting one thing, perhaps," he said, "and that is that I shall need help in the work. In fact, I was counting on your teaching me how to do it."

"There are plenty of girls who would be glad to get such a position for half the pay," was the answer promptly given. "An advertisement would bring a flock of them around you. In fact, you'd save a lot by it."

"But I don't want them," Gramling said, firmly, fixing her white face with determined eyes. "I want this work as much for you as for myself, Miss Lingle. The only thing I don't like about it is that Trimble puts your pay at a lower mark than mine, when you are an expert and I am wholly ignorant of what is required."

"How very absurd—when I am starving to death and the chance comes through you from a personal friend of yours."

"That is nothing. You must come with me. I want you. I want to help you. Don't you see that unless—unless I can aid you in your distress life will mean nothing to me from now on—nothing, absolutely nothing?"

"I am half afraid that you really mean that." She was not looking at him now, and a faint tremolo came into her voice.

"I *do* mean it," he said, firmly. "There is no use shirking the truth. I am ready to give my life to help you, and yet you hesitate to allow me to do a slight thing like this."

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"Then listen, Mr. Stirling," the girl said, steadying her voice and looking directly at him. "There is but one thing for me to do and that is to tell you all about myself."

"No, no," he protested.

"But why?" she inquired, as if at a loss to understand him.

"Simply because you have not seen fit to tell me so far, and such a delicate revelation must not come into a deal like this. It would look too much as though I required proof of your honesty, and I glory in the fact that I need none. No, you cannot tell me. I am satisfied as it is. I'd never feel right about it. Let it drop!"

"But I can't if—if I am to work under you and be paid by your friend. Now I want to work with you. I want the money, too—oh, I want it so badly! Let me tell you my story, Mr. Stirling."

"I can't hear it, Miss Lingle."

She received this in grim silence and he stood over her, the light of the gas from her room gleaming in her hair. He all but gave way to the impulse to bend down and take her limp hands in his and press them tenderly. "No, I can't hear it," he repeated, fervently, "but you are going to keep that money, and you are not going to see me do without the help I need so badly—help—and—and companionship. You are acting wrongly, and you know it."

Again, as she had done when he threw the bread

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away and made her dine with him, she seemed pleased rather than offended.

"There is no reason why I might not tell you all about myself except"—she hesitated—"except for the fact that—well, I dislike to—to have anyone whom I like know such humiliating accusations as have been made against me. It is an awful story—a pitiful story, Mr. Stirling. There are things in it which I could more freely confide to a sympathetic woman than—"

"Stop!" he commanded, almost fiercely. "You must not go on. I refuse to listen farther. You are going to help me in that work without telling me anything. You need the money, and I need you. That ends it."

She stood up, and they faced each other. She seemed vaguely pleased by the finality of his tone and manner.

"You are a tempter." She smiled. "I want the work. I want to earn money. I want to go to Oaklawn. I see it in my fancy now, its beautiful rooms and grounds, and feel its quiet privacy. Oh, to work there for six months would be heavenly!"

"Then we are going in Trimble's car in the morning," Gramling said.

"You say we are?"

"Yes, positively."

She had never seemed so beautiful as now in her frail indecision.

"Let me think," she said. "Let me read the

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letter again," and, picking it up from his bed, she took it to her room. He sat and waited, trembling with the fear that she might decide against him. Presently he noticed something white lying on his bed and he reached out and took it. It was the envelope and the money he had given her. That she had meant to leave it there he did not doubt. There was significance in the act and it filled him with vague forebodings. She was making no sound now, even the rustling of the letter had ceased. What was she thinking? What had she decided to do? Or had she yet decided?

"Miss Lingle!" he called out, but there was no response, and yet he was sure he had spoken loudly enough for her to hear. Then as her door was open he went to it and looked in. She had drawn her chair close to her bed and half lay, half reclined against its edge, her face downward.

"Miss Lingle!" he called again, but there was no response and no movement on her part. Alarmed, he went to her. She had fainted. Hurrying to his room, he got a flask of brandy and returned, just as she was reviving. She sat erect, staring about the room and through the doorway into the hall in a dazed, bewildered way.

"Where is he?" she asked, waving the brandy aside.

"Whom do you mean?" he inquired.

"Why, why, the young man—the one I met in the Subway. Why, you saw him. You must

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have seen him. He came up the stairs and passed your door."

"You must have dreamed it," Stirling said. "You fainted."

"No, I've been quite conscious," she protested. "I was reading the letter, trying to decide what to do, when he came straight in at the door, laid his hand over the letter in my lap, and smiled."

"‘Tell your troubles to no one at present,’ he said—or seemed to say. ‘Go to Oaklawn. Put the books in order. They need it and you must occupy your mind with something. This is killing you, and you must not die.’"

"Strange, strange!" Gramling said. "Then it is decided." He dropped the envelope into her lap. "Now," pouring some of the brandy into a glass, "drink this. It will revive you."

She obeyed, her eyes still flitting here and there in dumb, childlike inquiry.

"He seemed so real—so very real!" she said. "There was, as before, a wonderful, indescribable radiance about him—music, light, something, I know not what it was streaming from him. Oh, oh! I can't understand!"

"Now, let's do something reckless," Gramling proposed, thinking it best to change the subject. "We are rich; our pockets are full of money. Let's go out and celebrate. Let's go to a nice café somewhere farther over and have a royal banquet. You are hungry, and so am I."

"Yes, let's go, but not for a big feast like that,"

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she said. "We must not have our heads turned by prosperity. I'd rather go to Mrs. Steinbach's, and then I can pay the dear old soul for what she has done. Oh, it is glorious to have money, actual money! I can pay Mrs. Carr. I can buy some little things I have to have and take some others out of the pawnshop. Yes, I'll work with you, Mr. Stirling, and some day I'll tell you all my troubles. Some day when I know you very, very well it won't seem so hard, perhaps."

"That is wholly your own affair," Gramling answered. "There is no reason why you should tell me anything now or ever. I'd trust you with my very life. Come, put on your hat. Let's get out in the open. We are both hungry."

They were nearing Mrs. Steinbach's little place when Miss Lingle said: "I love her—I really love the dear old soul. She is sweet, gentle, and patient. She has had a very deep sorrow, and one few women of her age could bear."

"Sorrow? What sort of sorrow?" Gramling asked.

"A great tragedy," Miss Lingle answered, with feeling. "She had two sons of whom she was very proud and fond. Before her very eyes they were drowned one day. But that wasn't all; her husband brooded over it so much that he lost his mind. He is in an asylum now, and does not recognize her or his daughter."

"That's very sad," Gramling returned, recalling

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what Mrs. DuFresne had said while in her trance at the last meeting with her, and he decided to report the matter to Trimble along with Miss Lingle's real or fancied experiences at the Subway station and in her own room.

The old woman wore an air of great excitement when she saw them, and came forward. "Oh, mees, such a strange thing happened me this morning. I no understand it at all. Wait, I show you."

They took their accustomed places, facing each other, and the old woman shuffled across the room to a drawer and took out an envelope with her name on it and the postmark of New York. "What you t'ink, mees? It had one hundred dollars in it—ten ten-dollar bills, and dat was all—no letter—no not'ink, no name, just de money for me. De money was goot, too. I put heem in de savings bank wid de rest of my little money. De bank man said it was all right. What you t'ink, mees, who is send it?"

Miss Lingle shook her head. "It is a mystery to me," she answered. "It is like that other case of Kitty Quinn's. You remember I told you, Mrs. Steinbach? Somebody is doing good in secret in this neighborhood."

"Well, it make me reech." The old woman chuckled and beamed. "I no sleep dis night, I know."

She put the envelope away and came and took their order. "I've had some good luck, too, Mrs.

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Steinbach," Miss Lingle informed her. "I have found something to do at very good pay."

"Goot! Goot! Fine!" the old woman exclaimed. "And you—meester? You get some-t'ink to do yet already?"

"Yes." He smiled. "I am going to work also."

After supper they sat in the park on the bench they usually occupied. Games were going on in the playground. The children were shouting. An Italian was playing a hand organ and little girls were gracefully dancing on the asphalt walks.

"Now that you have employment," Gramling remarked, "don't you think you could find a more comfortable place to room?"

"No," she answered, slowly shaking her head. "I have grown to like it at Mrs. Carr's. I like her and she likes me. I'd miss her sorely if I left. Besides—you don't yet understand—I feel safer here in this quarter. I have never felt safer anywhere since—since I eluded my pursuers the last time. Oh yes, I must stay, Mr. Stirling. Besides, I don't deserve any better food and shelter than other people. My troubles have taught me that."

"The trip out and back every day will be hard on you," Gramling argued. "According to the railway time-table you'd have to get to the Grand Central Terminal at seven o'clock every morning."

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"Oh, I wouldn't mind that," she replied, promptly. "I like to rise early. But you—I presume that you will not care to stay longer at Mrs. Carr's now. It is no place for you."

"I like it, too," he said. "Yes, for the present I shall remain."

"I intended to pay Mrs. Steinbach something, but after hearing her good news I decided to wait," Miss Lingle said. "She'd refuse it now. Somebody is doing good in secret. How wonderful that is! What joy it must afford the giver!"

Gramling made no response.

CHAPTER XIV

“WELL, here we are,” Gramling said, as he and his companion dismissed Professor Trimble’s chauffeur at the gates of Oaklawn, and led her up one of the wide, tiled walks to the entrance of the mansion.

“Wonderful! Beautiful!” Miss Lingle exclaimed, enthusiastically. “And it is to be ours—wholly ours for six months! Just think of it, Mr. Stirling! Can we really use it as we like?”

“In every possible way,” Gramling said. “In my talk with Trimble he laid particular stress on that. The owner would want it so, he says.”

Gramling opened the door and they found themselves in the grand hall. Uttering exclamations of delight and wonder, Miss Lingle left him and ran joyously here and there through the great rooms. He heard her light steps on the stairs, in the chambers above, and, lastly, in the drawing-rooms. Suddenly he heard a chord struck on the grand piano. Skillfully and with wonderful harmony the notes were tested from the lowest to the highest, and then there was an improvised strain rippled off that was exquisitely beautiful.

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He hastened to her. "You play," he said. "That is fine. It will keep us company when we are tired and want to rest."

She raised an impassioned face to his. "My joints are stiff—my fingers all thumbs. It has been two years since I touched the keys of a piano. Yes, I'll play for you some day. I'll practice here if the owner wouldn't mind. Oh, would he care?"

"Not at all, I assure you. You improvise, do you not?"

"It is the only way I play," she replied. "I learned it in Florence under a mystical old professor, a dear old man. I used sometimes to forget where I was and who I was. I've missed my music, oh, so much!"

"You shall have all you like of it here," Gramling declared.

"It is all glorious, wonderful!" She turned from the keyboard. "Now where is the library?"

He showed her both of the rooms, and she scanned the filled shelves and stacks of books with a skilled eye.

"We must classify them first," she said. "We'll have to get an idea of what they consist of. They are dusty, and we must brush them as we put them into their permanent places. Shall we set to work now?"

He looked at his watch. "Let's simply look them over now and begin in the morning," he proposed. "Remember we have six months to

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do it in, and we ought not to slight our work by hurrying through it."

But she was already busy. With a pencil and notebook she was jotting down titles and authors and making descriptive notes, taking out volumes, glancing at them, and replacing them.

"Well, if you won't wait, put me to work," he said.

"Then find me a stepladder." She laughed. "Oh, you will come in handy enough! Many of the books are too heavy for me."

He found the ladder and brought it to her, and under her direction got down some of the highest books and placed them where she could get at them. He enjoyed the work. He had never been so charmed with his great house before. The sight of the closed gates and the tall iron fence which he could see from the windows, the wide sweep of vacant lawns, the neglected gardens with their well-designed beds, hedges, shrubbery, and trees gave him a delicious sense of isolation from the world in company with the only woman he had ever loved. For the time being she seemed in a sense his own.

That day passed all too quickly to them both. It was time to take the train, he informed her, and she got her hat and joined him in the great hall. She shrugged her shoulders.

"After all"—she made a little wry face—"I can't say that I exactly long for our slum quarters just now. It is the contrast, I suppose. This"—

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casting a backward glance into one of the *salons*—
“is like—like—”

“What you’ve been accustomed to,” he put in when she stopped with a little flush of subconscious embarrassment.

Her glance wavered on his face and then she nodded slowly: “Yes, I used to have it all, but that is past and gone forever. I had luxury and ease to begin life on, and then came something a million times worse than my hunger in my little room at Mrs. Carr’s. I must tell you about that. You are kind and whole-souled and could not imagine that a petted girl brought up in the lap of luxury could be treated as—as—”

“You must not tell me,” Gramling protested, gently. “It will do you no good to recite disagreeable things. You are to forget them, you know.”

She lowered her eyes and sighed. “Yes, I must not tell you now, at any rate,” she said. “The young man advised me to tell no one. How strange those two meetings with him seem! Since I’ve been here I think of him almost constantly. Sometimes he seems to be bending over my shoulder as I am studying a title-page or writing. Once when I was on the ladder he seemed to be standing at the foot, steadying it with his hands, and again he seemed to draw me toward the piano—invisible always—as if he wanted me to play. Sometimes I seem to hear him saying, ‘Play, play!’ in a sweet, dreamy way.”

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"Does the—the thought of him—the impression frighten you at all?" Gramling asked.

"Oh no! On the contrary! He seems to assure me that I am safe. He seems to love you, and—"

"Love me? How absurd!" Gramling said, with an odd stare.

"Yes, but I don't know why I am saying this. I don't know why I even thought it. It seemed to come into me from without, as if some mental force other than my own had thrust it into me."

They walked to the station. Gramling was glad that it was growing dusk, for he dreaded meeting someone whom he knew and who might betray his identity to his companion. The station was practically deserted and he breathed more freely when he had found her a seat in the crowded car and went into another. He told himself that that was a thing he must be most careful about, for if Miss Lingle discovered the ruse he was playing she might refuse to continue the work she had begun. He told himself that in the future in going to Oaklawn and returning they must be seen together as little as possible. Now that she knew the way, she could travel alone, and he would furnish some pretext for not accompanying her.

They dined at Mrs. Steinbach's before going to their rooms, and as usual sat in the recreation park until ten o'clock. The night was warm and sultry and the old tin-roofed building was as hot as an oven when they finally entered it.

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"I have some materials to buy in the morning," he said to her as he bade her good night at her door, "and so I'll meet you at Oaklawn. I am sure you can find the way now."

"Without the slightest difficulty," she answered.

The days went by like short dream periods to Gramling. Good food, freedom from worry, and an agreeable occupation were having a beneficent effect on Miss Lingle. Her color was improved, her cheeks were filling out, and some of the gowns which she had recovered from the pawnshop had a costly look and were most becoming.

They sometimes brought the necessary supplies with them and prepared their own lunch in the great kitchen. Once, in a playful mood, Miss Lingle served it in the stately dining room. She donned a maid's cap and apron and pretended to be a waitress, insisting on serving him as he sat at the head of the table. With a touch of genius she assumed the dialect of an Irish girl and danced about as merrily as a joyous child.

"You are happy, Miss Lingle," he remarked, beaming on her in sheer delight in the change that had come over her.

"Yes, but you mustn't call me Miss Lingle any more," she smiled. "It is too formal—too cold between friends such as we are. I am tired of it—from you."

"But I know no other name for you," he said, lamely. "You have never told me—"

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"Well, I will tell you." She sat down at his side, her grave, violet eyes peeping at him from beneath the cap's white ruffle. "It is Lucia. Do you like it?"

"It is beautiful." His voice was clogged by the warmth of his growing passion. "And it is your real one?"

"Yes, but the other isn't, of course. I've used many, and Lingle is the ugliest one of all. Sounds like tingle, doesn't it? Oh, I am so happy to-day! Shall I play for you?"

"Yes, please do."

"Then stay here—right here with your coffee and cigar. I'll open the doors so that you can hear."

"But why may I not go along and—"

"Because I can't play when anyone is looking at me. It makes me self-conscious—or something; I know I can't do it that way."

She tripped away. He heard a harmonious chord struck on the piano and then there was no further sound. He waited impatiently, his coffee growing cold, his cigar dying between his inert fingers.

Presently she came back, frowning prettily. "It won't come—it simply won't come!" she said. "I am not in the mood. It may be the daylight—the fact that you are waiting and expecting something unusual from me. I play better at night, in the moonlight, at dusk, or on a rainy day. It is queer, but when I can't play like this

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some evil influence seems to clasp me, weights my hands down, depresses me."

"You haven't eaten your lunch," he said. "Now, I'm the butler and you my mistress. Sit where you are, madam."

Laughingly she allowed him to serve her, as pleased as a child over his antics, his adroit pretense at stumbling while he held a loaded tray in his hands, his clumsy attempt at a French accent into which he dropped a few genuine and well-pronounced French expressions.

"You speak French, I see," she said, charmingly, in that tongue.

He responded in the same language, and the remainder of their rest period was spent in French conversation. How perfectly and musically she talked! It was a fresh source of delight to him, and she, too, seemed to like this new side of him.

"I'm sorry I couldn't play," she said, as they were starting back to work. "I thought the mood was on me, but it fled. I used to play for Ashley. He loved my music, and even now he seems to inspire me when I am at my best."

"Ashley?" Gramling repeated. "You have mentioned him before, but I do not yet know who he was."

"Why, I thought I told you! He was my brother. Ashley is a family name with us. It was my mother's maiden name. Lord Ashley, the Earl of—" She suddenly broke off. "How

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silly of me! I have made up my mind never to allude to my family's rank in life, and yet I am doing it. I am worse than nobody now, at any rate, Mr. Stirling. I owe all my misfortune primarily to what some persons would call good fortune. But you say that I mentioned the name of my brother to you before. Whom did you think I meant, if not my dear brother?"

"I didn't know," he replied, haltingly. "I was afraid that he was a lover or—or even your husband."

"Husband!" She laughed, her blue eyes twinkling. "So you thought I might be a widow! No, I've never been married, and as for having a lover, that is not true, either. I had suitors, yes, but I didn't like them. I always thought they were after my inheritance. They seemed cold and calculating. Yes, my inheritance was my curse. I hope I am free from it forever. I only want to live in seclusion and peace from now on. Work is a blessing. I'm happier here than I've ever been in my life. And you like it, too, Mr. Stirling?"

"I show it, don't I?" He smiled.

"Yes, you are changed. When I first saw you you looked depressed and morbid, but—I can't describe it. You are changed, that's all."

"How could I help it?" he answered, fervently. "Life has meant nothing to me before, but now it is glorious—heavenly! With you alone like this, Lucia, I—"

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Raising a finger in his face, she checked him with a firm smile.

“You mustn’t,” she said, simply. “You know that is a forbidden topic. We are friends, close, close friends, drawn together by adversity, but that is all. Now let’s get to work.”

CHAPTER XV

ONE day near the time for their return to the city the skies became dark with storm clouds. "We must hurry to get to our train," he warned her as he stood at a window. "It looks like a heavy rain."

She hastened for her hat and wrap and they started out. A high wind was blowing from the south and drops of rain were already falling. "I am really afraid we can't make it," he said, as they reached the gates. "We'll be drenched to the skin and it might make you ill."

"We must go on," she said. "It is almost dark."

A fierce dash of rain was her answer. Grasping her by the arm, Gramling drew her back through the gate, closed it, and said: "We must go back and wait till it is over. We can catch the next train."

"But that would be eight o'clock," she said, protestingly, an expression of indecision on her face.

"It doesn't matter," he said, firmly. "I am not going to let you make yourself ill."

She seemed not displeased, but took his extended arm and allowed him to draw her back to

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the house. When within, he touched a button, and the lights in the hall and in many connecting rooms flared up.

"This is better," he said. "What does it matter if we are a few hours late?"

"No, it really doesn't," she admitted. "How different it all looks at night! I really believe I'm wet. Those drops went right in."

"You are cold, too," he said, considerably. "You are shivering."

"A little," she admitted.

He had bethought himself of something. There was an open fireplace in the main *salon* and it was ready for use, holding logs of wood and kindling. He applied a match to it, and almost instantly a blaze and warmth came forth. Placing a chair for her near the fire he insisted on her sitting down. He felt of her sleeve.

"It is really wet," he said, "but the fire will soon dry it out."

But there was no let-up in the storm. The rain continued to fall in torrents. The wind dashed the water against the windows, jerking and rattling the blinds and sashes. Eight o'clock came and passed. Gramling saw her go to the hall and glance uneasily at the clock.

"There is a train at nine," she said. "It is the last one. We must catch it. Could we not telephone for a cab?"

Stunned by the suggestion, Gramling hesitated. How could he telephone without being heard by

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her, and how could he order a cab without using his right name?

But he was equal to the emergency. "The cabs are never out as late as this," he said. "There is little traffic in their line after eight. I wonder if you would object to something very sensible and very practical. Lucia, let's not be prudish and puritanical. A trip to New York and back between now and work time in the morning would really be unnecessary. Let's sit up here and read, work, or talk—anything. I'll make some toast and coffee for you at midnight. There is plenty of fuel downstairs. I saw it the other day when I was nosing around."

"I'm anything but a prude," she said, after a moment's pause. "I've been kicked about too much for that. I know what I am within myself and if you don't mind we'll stay. In fact, I rather like the idea."

They chatted till midnight. He made the coffee and toast on the coals and they enjoyed them like happy children on a picnic. The rain continued to fall, the wind to blow and dismally moan and whistle. Presently, seeing that she was quiet, he got a pillow and put it behind her head.

"Now, take a nice nap," he suggested, gently. "You'll need a rest for to-morrow's work. I know you must be tired."

"The fire *does* make one drowsy." She smiled dreamily as she nestled down in the soft pillow.

He touched a button, and the overhead lights

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went out, leaving only the soft glow of the fire in the great room. He took a high, winged chair and began to smoke a cigar. The storm was abating somewhat. The great mansion was still throughout. Half an hour passed. He thought Lucia was asleep. He had never experienced such joyous peace and restfulness as had come to him.

Suddenly Lucia raised her head and glanced at him. She smiled.

"Sit where you are," she said. "Don't look at me. Keep your eyes on the fire. I feel—I feel as if Ashley were asking me, as he used to ask me, to play for him. I don't know, but maybe I can. I want to interpret the storm, his control over it, and protection of me."

Fearful of breaking the spell that seemed to be on her, Gramling made no response nor lifted his gaze from the flames as she rose and went to the open piano in a far corner of the room.

There was a pause. Then she began to play. There was still a patter of rain on the windows and her soft music seemed in a weird way to accompany its cadences and the moaning wind. Gramling adored music. He had heard the best in many lands, and yet this to-night transcended any musical experience he had ever had. The very rosy glow of the logs and coals seemed to reach out toward the performer as if in hungry adoration. That human fingers could be so deft he had never believed. Memories of his youth and childhood hovered about him. The great room was filled

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with the bejeweled dames and courtly men who had been entertained there by his parents. In the hall stood liveried servants, and from without sounded the pounding of hoofs and the crunching of carriage wheels. From the grand stairway came the rustling of silken skirts, the dainty tread of slippered feet—merry laughter and happy greetings.

“Gone, gone! All gone never to return,” he said, a sob in his tight throat, “and I’m alone—all alone here in this gilded tomb of memories. But no, he was not alone. Lucia was there, incomparable, mysterious Lucia. His eyes were drawn to her by force. Like an exquisite portrait she sat, her profile to him, her fair hands flitting over the keys like white butterflies dipping into the hearts of flowers.

Why he did it he could not have said, but, forgetting her orders, he rose and moved noiselessly up behind her. She seemed to sense his presence, for she stopped playing and looked up at him. Something in the depths of her inquiring eyes seemed to invite it while yet it shrank away, and he put his hands on her head, bent it toward him, and kissed her on the lips. They warmly contracted under his, almost as if in impulsive, unconscious response, and then she stood up. Taking his hands in hers she faced him, a reproachful look dawning in her eyes.

“Why did you do that?” she asked. “Exactly that? It was wrong.”

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"Forgive me—forgive me, Lucia!" he cried, as if waking from a dream. "I did not know what I was doing."

She held his hands against her breast and fixed his repentant eyes with her own. "I understand," she faltered. "It was my fault, Mr. Stirling. I, too, was dreaming. I felt you coming. I knew when you left your chair, but it must never happen again—never. We'll forget it, won't we?"

He clung to her pliant hands. He wanted to draw her to him, but he felt the rigid resistance in her arms. "I've never loved before, Lucia," he panted. "I am not myself to-night. You've lifted me to clouds and skies of bliss. You've torn my soul from my body with your angelic music."

"I understand," she sighed, softly. "But I must not lead you on. You see, I *know* and you do not. It may be that you will never know. You must not think of me ever again as you did just now. I may have to leave you at any moment. I am not mistress of my fate."

"But you are of mine," he declared. "I swear I cannot live without you."

"Poor fellow!" she sighed. "Have I really brought misfortune to you, who have been so kind, even when in trouble yourself?"

"Don't—don't desert me!" he pleaded. "I simply can't exist without you. I've been born again. I live for the first time."

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"You must not think of me that way," she said, moving back to her chair and pillow and sitting down, her hands locked over her knee resolutely. "I'd be a curse to you or any man. I know what I am, Mr. Stirling, and I shall not inflict myself and my burdens on you. You are the dearest friend I ever had, short as our acquaintance has been. Our ill luck has drawn us together, but we are destined to part."

"Never!" he declared. "I'll never leave you."

Slowly she shook her beautiful head, her gaze on the fire, and heaved a deep, lingering sigh. "I can't explain," she said, her sweet lips tightened, "but I know that I am telling you the truth as to our parting. The hour and day I don't know—but it is inevitable."

He said nothing, for she had nestled down in the pillow and closed her eyes. The rosy firelight played on her face and over her hair.

"You need rest," he said, considerately. "Sleep now."

She made no answer, and presently he left her. Going upstairs to one of the bedrooms, he filled his arms with pillows and coverings, brought them down to the library and spread them on a wide couch in one of the alcoves. Then he went back to her. She opened her eyes as he approached and smiled like a drowsy child.

"Come with me," he said. "I want to show you something."

Wonderingly she rose, and he led her into the

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library and to the couch. "You must lie down here and sleep," he said, in a tone of gentle finality. "You shall not sit up in a chair all night."

She hesitated and then smiled. "You are very thoughtful and good," she said. "Yes, I'll do it. But you? What shall you do?"

"Stand guard over you," he answered, half jestingly. "I shall be before the fire. Call me if you are frightened."

"Frightened?" she scoffed. "Why, I'd not be afraid to sleep here alone. No, do not sit up, Mr. Stirling. It would be foolish. Let's take your friend, the professor, at his word and make Mr. Gramling's property our own. Now go up to one of the rooms and go to bed."

"Are you sure you would not be afraid?"

"Sure," she laughed, "and, to be frank, I'll sleep all the better if I know you are up there and comfortable."

"Then it's a go," he laughed. "And I'll sleep in the owner's bed. — Good night."

CHAPTER XVI

IN his old room Gramling slept unusually well, and when he waked the next morning it was eight o'clock. The storm was over and the sun was streaming in at his windows. Hurriedly dressing, he went down. Hearing a little clatter in the kitchen, he went thither. Lucia was there in apron and cap preparing something at the range.

"What's this? What's this?" he called out.

"Getting ready to feed a hungry man," she laughed, her eyes twinkling.

"But the supplies?" he insisted. "Where did they come from?"

Again she laughed and smiled. "I went beyond the castle gates, over the moat, sire, and secured them from the inn hard by. The surly publican did not want to serve me, but I prevailed on him to accommodate my lord, who was still abed after a night of carousing, and I have here some of the churlish rascal's cream, bread, and fresh-laid eggs."

"You are a trump!" he cried.

"Aye, sire, but methinks a trumpery trump who is unworthy of thy bounty," Lucia jested.

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He took the tray from her hands and bore it to the dining room, where the cloth was already laid. "If only we could remain marooned like this always!" he said, earnestly. "Lucia, how did you sleep?"

"Most comfortably," she said. "I think I never slept so well before. I feel rested and ravenously hungry. How good it is not to have to hurry to catch a train!"

"And yet you got up early to get these things," he complained. "That shall not happen again. I'll order some supplies sent to-day. They will come in handy when we have our lunch here."

They went to work shortly after breakfast. His duties kept him that morning in the lower library, while she was occupied in the one above. It was about ten o'clock when, being desirous of some technical information from her, he went up the stairs. At first he failed to see her among the great heaps of books on the tables, and, his footsteps muffled by the thick carpeting and rugs, he was searching for her here and there when he suddenly descried her near a window, half hidden by the massive curtains. She was holding something in her hand, at which, white faced and wide eyed, she was staring fixedly. Even across the room he saw that she was pale and agitated.

He hastened to her. "What is wrong?" he asked.

Mutely she stared, and the hand holding the photograph at which she had been looking sank

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limply at her side. Her fingers relaxed in their hold upon the picture, and she let it lie at her feet. He picked it up. It was a photograph of his brother Morten.

"Where did you find this?" he asked, at a loss for something to say and dreading he knew not what.

"Among those books," she answered, the white stare still in her eyes, her lips quivering helplessly as she pointed at an overladen table. "Oh, I can't understand. It is driving me crazy."

"What is it that you can't understand, Lucia?" he asked, bewildered by her growing agitation and fairly chilled by his own.

For answer she dumbly moved back to the table at which she had been writing cards, sat down, and stared at the floor.

With the photograph in his hand Gramling went to her. "What is wrong, Lucia?" he inquired, now startled and alarmed, for she looked as if she were about to faint.

"I can't make it out." She gave him her eyes steadily. "Whose picture is that, Mr. Stirling?"

"Why, it is Morten—Morten Gramling—the brother of—of the owner of this place. He is dead, you know."

"How do you know this is his photograph?" she demanded, still fixing him with her bewildered stare.

"Because—because it's here—for one thing," he stammered, "and because it looks like the man

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I've often seen with Gramling. Yes, it is he. I'm sure of that. This is Morten Gramling."

"Are you sure, Mr. Stirling?"

"Quite, Lucia. But why are you so wrought up over it? Why, you are pale and trembling!"

She lowered her head to her hand, wearily stroked her pale brow, and sighed. "Mr. Stirling, that is the man who appeared to me at the Subway station and in my room at Mrs. Carr's. Oh, I can't make it out!"

For a moment he could formulate nothing in words with which to meet the strange situation, and he simply stood scanning the picture aimlessly.

Suddenly she stood up, took the photograph, and stared at it steadily. "Yes, this is the man—there is no doubt about it," she faltered. "You say he is dead—he couldn't be, for he stood before me twice; he spoke; he smiled gently, persuasively, and yet—and yet—"

"And yet what, Lucia?" Gramling asked, at the end of his resources.

"And yet," she concluded, "he was not alive in the sense that you and I are alive, for he came on both occasions out of nothing and vanished strangely. And then there was something ethereal, dreamlike, transitory in his appearance—something exalted, supersensual like the fancies I have of things and persons when I play the piano."

Gramling was nonplused. He dared not explain fully, and so he remained silent. Presently she recovered and insisted on going to work.

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"Let it pass," she said, waving her hand and taking up her pen. "I'm full of wonder, even bewildered, and not yet afraid. If this is the old home of my strange friend, and if he is really dead, I shall feel as if he led me here for my own good and safety."

"That's the way to look at it," Gramling said, somewhat relieved at this view of the matter and her returning calmness. She still held the photograph in her hands and she suddenly placed it facing them on a shelf of books already in order.

"Let it stay there," she said. "I feel that it is the kindly face of a friend."

The next day, by appointment with Gramling, Professor Trimble called. Gramling heard the sound of his car and went to the main entrance to admit him.

"Is she willing to meet me?" were Trimble's first words.

"Yes, indeed, though perhaps a little fearful that you may ask for references like all the rest. Manage to throw that off some way, Trimble."

"Oh, I can do that, I guess," the professor answered, lightly. "But before we go in to her I want to make an appointment with you to visit Madame DuFresne. The whole thing is at a standstill. Your brother keeps inquiring for you, it seems. Annette speaks of no one else, and you must go with me. How will to-morrow evening suit you?"

"Very well," answered Gramling, and then he

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bethought himself of the incidents pertaining to his brother's appearance to Lucia and recognition of the photograph.

"Fine! fine!" Trimble declared. "It is weaving itself into a wonderful pattern. I'm deeply interested, old man. I've traced out many things since I took up the investigation of psychic phenomena, but this is ahead of them all. You see the whole thing is logical and consecutive, beginning with your first contact with your brother while you were under ether. Then came that queer dream of your man Strong confirming the order through Annette that you live on the East Side, where you met this lady who has twice seen your brother and been substantially aided by him. The only thing unexplained concerns the lady herself."

"I have not had a chance to tell you this," Gramling said. "You remember the name Ashley, mentioned by Annette?"

"Yes, I do now, the dead lover, or husband, or—"

"He was her brother," Gramling broke in. "A brother she loved devotedly and who was closely attached to her till the day of his death in Florence."

"Ah, that is strange!" Trimble said. "And beautiful, too. Your brother and her brother seem to be working for a common purpose—to aid you two. But come, present me. I am eager to meet her."

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They found Lucia at her favorite working table. There was no mistaking the professor's admiration as he bowed and shook hands. No skilled diplomat could have played his part more delicately than he did. Looking about the room, he fairly rubbed his hands with delight at the evidences of the work being accomplished.

"I'm lucky in running across you two," he chuckled. "My friend Gramling is very anxious to have this done while he is away, and I'm delighted with the progress already made. What a beautiful hand you write, Miss Lingle! It is like print. What a careful worker you are! I had a letter from Gramling yesterday. He was overjoyed to know that I had put the thing under way. He wants you to make yourselves thoroughly at home here. In fact, he hopes you will use the house as you like in every way."

"We are already doing it," Lucia said, smiling. "We took you at your word, Professor Trimble. We cook our lunches in the big kitchen, dine in the great dining room, and once we were storm-bound and I slept on that couch in the alcove."

"Good! good!" Trimble beamed on her. "If you knew Gramling as well as I do you'd even tackle the wine in his cellar. There is plenty of it. I know, for I've sampled it often."

Here the professor noticed the photograph of Morten Gramling and took it up.

"Hush, Mr. Stirling," Lucia suddenly said, warningly. "I want to ask the professor some-

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thing. Do you happen to know whose photograph that is?"

"Why, yes, that is Morten Gramling, my friend's brother. Poor fellow! He met his death in an automobile accident."

Lucia made no comment, but simply lowered her head over the entry she was making and wrote steadily.

"Now I called partly on business," Trimble went on, as he replaced the photograph on the shelf. "Your first month is up and as Gramling has more money than he can well handle I've drawn on him for your next month's pay in advance. I've brought the money with me."

"Good!" Gramling answered, with a well-assumed air of pleased surprise. "We need it, you may be sure."

Trimble took out some bills, paid Lucia hers first, and then handed the remainder to Gramling. Lucia carelessly opened a drawer, brushed the money into it, and thanked him. "I am glad you like my writing," she said, simply. "I want to prove worthy of your confidence."

"You've already proved it," Trimble declared, warmly, as he held out his hand, being ready to go. "May I drop in again? I like it here with you two—somehow I feel more at home than in my stuffy quarters in town."

"We'd be glad to see you at any time," Lucia said, a slight flush in her face. And without rising

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she gave him her hand, which, in itself, had significance to the observer.

"Wonderful! wonderful!" Trimble said, enthusiastically, as he and Gramling stood in the hall.

"You mean the work?" Gramling inquired.

"I mean the lady!" Trimble retorted, crisply. "My friend, she is a dream! She is beautiful, intellectual, graceful, gracious—everything! Take it from me, there is something marvelous about her. She is no ordinary individual."

"I thought you'd find her so," Gramling said, flushing with delight. "If you'd seen as much of her as I have you'd be even more favorably impressed."

"And as yet," Trimble said, observantly, "you know nothing about her antecedents or why she is being persecuted?"

"Nothing as yet," Gramling answered. "Several times she has seemed willing to enlighten me, but the subject is evidently a most painful one, and as she is actuated by a false sense of gratitude to me for the little I have done for her, I have checked her."

"That is right, of course," answered the professor, "but I must say that I am overwhelmed with curiosity. Why, she looks like a royal princess, and that nondescript accent is the most musical and appealing thing I've ever heard. From now on, old man, list me as a worker in her behalf. Call on me for anything at any time."

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When Trimble had left, Gramling went back to Lucia. "How do you like our boss?" he asked, lightly.

"Very, very much." She smiled. "He made me, somehow, feel that he was a friend on whom I could rely in almost any emergency. He is gentle, genial, sympathetic. I could trust him—yes, I could trust a man like that."

"You may be glad to know that he is pleased with you personally as well as with your work," answered Gramling. "I assure you that he took quite a strong liking to you. He said so as we were parting in the hall."

Lucia shrugged prettily, smiled, and opened the drawer. "I wasn't expecting this money so soon," she said, irrelevantly it seemed to Gramling. "There are some things I want to buy. I must take a day off for shopping."

CHAPTER XVII

ON the evening of the following day the two psychic investigators went to visit Annette. Pierre was at the little gate and seemed put out by something which had occurred.

"I want to see you, Meester Trimble," he faltered, his eyes downcast. "I no want trouble, but I no like de way Annette act every day now. She ain't de same she was. She get excite' all de time. When she come out from her trance wid you she snap me up. I'm a pig; she scream when I touch her; she no like my pipe smell, an' say dat me sweat too much in my work."

"That will be all right, Pierre," Trimble said, reassuringly. "It is only a natural irritation. You know when she is helping me she has delight—visions, experiences, dreams, call them what you will, and at first when she comes back to everyday life she experiences a sort of natural impatience with them."

"Well, I no like it," Pierre answered, impatiently. "Father Flynn said maybe—he told me, Meester Trimble, he told me that all dis thing was maybe work of bad spirits. Me an' Annette was all right before she got dis way."

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"Never mind, Pierre," Trimble said, laying his hand on the man's shoulder. "It will all come out right. I've never known harm to result when things are conducted on scientific grounds."

Just then Annette came to the door, bowed coldly, and said, "Come in, gentlemen."

They entered the darkened parlor and she closed the door.

"You are not feeling well, are you, Annette?" Trimble inquired.

"Oh, I'm all right, but Pierre—Pierre he have a mad grouch all de time now when he come home. Father Flynn said I was doing vare wrong. I don't know, Professor, but I can't help myself from my temper. When I am asleep I'm happy—happy—happy—in heaven almost, but when I wake back alive it is like—like you cut me with knives; like you pile stones on me and crush like a wine press my bones; and when Pierre touches me or speak to me I go wild with crazy spell. I shiver, I hold de nose, I am awful seek in de stomach. I scream an' beg Pierre to run away."

"That's bad, of course," Trimble said, regretfully. "Do you feel, Annette, that we ought to give up these investigations?"

She was silent in her chair opposite theirs. They heard her take in and exhale a deep breath. "I don't know," she finally got out, slowly. "I want it—I want it more and more. I taste it like wine raining from God's white clouds. Den I have no body—no pain, no trouble. I float like

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a sea bird in clouds soft and light. I hear music—music. I shout; I sing; I weep always with the great joy, and they tell me—they always tell me—the spirits tell me, Meester Trimble, that I have only reached the border line. An' that is why they can get to me in my shadows. Why is it? Why is it so?"

"It is one of the wonders of this particular science," Trimble answered, as much to Gramling as to her. "You are a marvel, Annette. You can't realize it, but you have opened a vast door to hidden facts. I don't want you to become unhappy with your husband over this, but I should dislike to lose your aid just now when we are doing so well."

"They tell me dat I should help you," Annette said.

"The spirits?" Trimble inquired, adroitly.

"The two of them. The two young friends—the—the—the—" Annette broke off. Silence fell in the room. They heard her breathing heavily.

"She's gone already," Trimble whispered. "It is strange how suddenly it comes on her at times. I have a new theory that discarnate entities themselves sometimes induce sleep on the part of mediums. I seldom use hypnotic powers with Annette now. It is always a good sign, too, for the best results follow it, as a rule."

"Hush, will you!" Annette suddenly commanded, in a harsh, impatient tone. "You wake

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me—you draw me back over—over, down—down— Oh, here they come! Yes, yes, they are there again in my black little parlor. Don't you see them crouching in the chairs, and Pierre—Pierre—is that his name?—like a watchdog at the door angry over what?"

"Who do you see, Annette?" Trimble asked, softly.

"Who? Mor—Morten, yes, Morten, and—and—and the Ashley one, always together and anxious about the beautiful, unhappy one—Lucia. Yes the name, Lucia. I see her in the mirror Ashley holds—a pretty girl in a sunny land—my own country, France, and Italy. There I see her and this Ashley joyous till his body withered from his soul. Then the great ship—the ocean and at last America. Ah! there the great evil gathered about her. The evil one, a man. *Ach*, the lies, the sworn lies! The help of the blackest powers all against one so young, helpless, and pitiful."

Annette ceased speaking. She could be heard breathing laboriously. Trimble seemed afraid of disturbing the rare spell that was on her, so he did not, as formerly, put her into an easier position.

"Go on, please, Annette; we are listening," he urged, gently, an uncontrollable quiver in his voice.

"Yes, yes." Of her own accord she moved her head, and her voice became clear and easy.

"They want you to know it all, because she

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would be pained by the telling, and you will help her when you understand. They give me this as from their minds, not their tongues—their wise minds emptying into my little one somehow, not with sound as on earth as harsh as the baying of dogs at night, but the way it is here in the—the light. How can I explain the light to you born blind? There is nothing I can compare it to that you have seen. Yes, they want you to know about the beautiful, patient, hunted one. The evidence, false as hell. The examinations. The black lies of her acts and designs. Then the hellish verdict. She swoons. I am given that to behold. The confinement. The humiliation. The prayers always received by Ashley, the dear brother of Italian skies and air, who cannot leave the earth on her account. The long suffering—the punishment without food and then the escape. Thank God, the escape, led by Ashley! The pursuit—the sly detectives ever on the trail. Here to-day, off to-morrow again from city to city. Finally the small room among the very poor. A friend, yes, then a real friend—a lover, yes, a lover, I think, and at last a grand place—a castle? No, in America still—New York. Gardens, great rooms, books and art and music. She is happy now—oh, so happy and safe asleep and awake. And yet—and yet—” Annette’s voice trailed away into silence.

“And yet,” Trimble repeated, gently and insistently.

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"And yet the two guardians here in the light are uneasy. They see beyond my vision and seem unable to give me quite of what they fear. Danger—that is the word. Her safety cannot last. It is the cruel, iron law they dread, I think. Her enemy will return her to the confinement she left, and he has more false evidence ready. He intends her slow death there and again he gains—what does he gain? The guardians do not give me of that yet."

"Have you, Annette, any special advice for my friend here to-night?"

"Yes—no," was the halting response; "he is doing already much. He is mounting to the light himself from his vats of despair. His great love has made him over. The Morten one lifts and smiles and encourages. Now he and Ashley one are vanishing. They try to hold here in the shade, but they melt like rainbows rising in the blue."

"Wait, Annette, please," Trimble said, gravely. "Can you tell me what it is like—where you are, I mean?"

Annette sighed aloud. She seemed to shake herself impatiently.

"*Ach*, impossible! Tell a spewing infant that its tin rattle will become a golden scepter and it will understand as well as you of what is given me. It is different with every minute. Laugh me if you will, but as the Master speaks through me just now I have, myself, been so great that

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worlds like yours have rolled like pebbles under the feet—black pebbles, while I, myself, was of the light. Strange, but I sometimes think that each being somehow becomes the whole in the far away, and the whole—well, it is an ocean of bliss.”

“Wait a moment, Annette,” Trimble said, quietly. “Can you help me to understand why it is that your manner of speech varies so much? At times you use the dialect of the French quite as when you are awake. Then again—”

“That is simple,” the medium interrupted. “I speak what is given me by the low as well as the high. The best, I think, comes from the poets who are here, I assure you. I reach out for the poet’s thoughts in hunger, and now and then take them in. Yes, I take them in, but never deliver them to you—a holy zephyr in a tin trumpet. It is absurd—absurd. I can only try, monsieur.”

“One other thing, Annette,” Trimble said, urgently. “I was forgetting. Do they wish—this Morten and Ashley—do they wish Lucia to know of these experiments of ours?”

“Nevare, Meester Trimble! They pause. I see your thought streaming out to theirs. They catch it. No, I’m given to say. Lucia must not now know of this. The reason? I don’t catch that, you friends of light. Yes, now I comprehend a little the reason. It is because the Morten one has spoken to her twice in the flesh and will again. Your work would make her doubt

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it all at present. They are the rainbow again, and gone. Ah, I smell the stench of the earth, feel the jar of it as it rolls and rocks, and hear the snarl of it as it whirls in its sand bed of planets too minute to be studied by the wise college maggots with the round-windowed eyes, who know naught of the human soul and build down the minds of the young."

Annette was waking and Trimble led the way from the house. "What do you think of her?" he asked his companion.

"I think she is a marvel," was the reply.

"We don't know what it all means," Trimble said, earnestly, "and the worst of it is we may never know more than we do about it, but it is vastly interesting to me, specially the way you and Lucia are mixed up in it. By the way, I have been wondering. Does she not think it strange that you should continue to live in that ramshackle rooming house now that you are supposed to be earning some money?"

Gramling smiled. "I told her that I was in debt and wanted to pay out."

"Good!" Trimble laughed. "And you didn't say that it was to be near her?"

"She knows that already," Gramling said.

CHAPTER XVIII

ONE evening Gramling had been out for a walk alone and returned about eight o'clock. To his surprise, he found Mrs. Carr waiting for him at the front door. She looked quite grave.

"Miss Lingle is anxious to see you," she announced. "She has been down twice. She is in her room. I think she is worried about something."

Hurrying up the stairs, he found the door of Lucia's room ajar and rapped on it. She admitted him at once. She was quite pale and nervous. Her voice shook when she spoke.

"I'm in trouble again, Mr. Stirling," she began, "and this time it is very serious."

"What is it?" he asked.

She sank down on the edge of her bed and locked her hands in her lap, her blue eyes raised to his.

"They are closing in on me," she sobbed. "I think it is all up with me now."

"But why—why?" he cried, aghast.

"This evening," she began, "as I left the Subway station and started this way I saw a man following me. Presently I got a good look at him and recognized him. He is the shrewdest de-

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ductive on my trail. He has followed me all over America. I did not know what to do, but determined that I'd not let him see me enter this house. But, unfortunately, Mrs. Carr was on the stoop and, not understanding, stopped me. The man was close behind me and there was nothing to do but to come on in. He walked on and pretended not to see me, but from a window of Mrs. Carr's room I saw him standing on the opposite side of the street, a little way down. I watched him for some time and presently saw another man whom I think I've seen before walk up to him and stand talking. After a moment the detective left him there on guard and hurried away. That man is still there, or was a moment ago."

"And you fear that—" Gramling began, and broke off for the lack of adequate expression.

"I'm sure the detective has gone to get the necessary papers or officers to take me in charge. He may not come back till morning, but the man he left will see that I do not leave without his knowing where I go. I told Mrs. Carr that I wanted to see you. I wanted you to understand in advance."

"But it must not be," Gramling cried, at once angry and dejected. "Something must be done, and quickly. Wait, I'll walk out and see if the guard is still there."

She made no protest and he left her. In a few minutes he returned. It had begun to rain and he was quite wet.

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"He is there," Gramling said. "I watched him for several minutes. He kept his eyes steadily on the front door. I've been thinking. Is there any way that you could get out through the rear?"

"None at all." Lucia sighed. "The fence is high between the houses, and what reason could a stranger give the tenants at this time of night? If I knew them it would be different."

"Then my other plan must be tried," Gramling said. "Listen; you may not like the idea, but it must be done. I have another suit of clothes. It is too large for you, but we could tuck up the legs and sleeves, and with them on on a rainy night like this, with an umbrella held down over your face—"

"Oh, oh, I see!" Lucia cried, hopefully. "It might work. It really might!"

He hastened to get the clothes and a slouch hat and umbrella. "I think we'd better hurry," he cautioned her as he laid them on her bed. "I'm afraid the rain might let up, and we need it to-night."

"Well, I will," she cried. "Give me ten minutes."

There was a vacant room on that floor overlooking the street, and Gramling went to one of its windows and looked out. It was still raining and in the electric street light he saw in a doorway opposite the man who was watching the door. Gramling remained at the window several minutes and then went back to Lucia's door.

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"How are you getting on?" he asked, softly.

"Almost ready. You may come in."

He found her tucking her abundant hair up under the slouch hat. She appeared very quaint, odd, and diminutive in the business suit of gray cloth, and yet to him marvelously pretty.

"I've been wondering," he began. "Where are you going? You know, dressed that way, you might find it hard to get admission to a hotel or rooming house at night. You can't roam about, you know. The police might—"

"I haven't thought of that." She faltered, and stood staring helplessly up at him.

"I have thought of it, and I have a plan," he said. "Now the best thing for you to do—if we can elude this man in front—is for you to take the first taxicab you meet for the Grand Central Terminal and catch the ten-fifteen train for Oaklawn. Would you be afraid to stay there alone?"

"Oh no, no!" she said, eagerly, studying his face expectantly. "I'd not be afraid of anything to get away from—"

"Well, once there unobserved," Gramling broke in, "you'd be absolutely safe, and you know you can use the house as you like. You must take one of the rooms and make yourself comfortable. Fortunately you have a set of keys. Where are they?"

Lucia got them out of her hand bag. "I wonder if I might borrow a valise from you to put some

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of my things in. I'll need them to-morrow and to-night."

He hurriedly got his bag and brought it in. "Make haste," he urged. "The rain might let up at any moment."

He went back to the window of the vacant room and looked out. The man was still in the doorway. The rain was falling steadily. When he reached Lucia she was ready, the packed bag and umbrella in her hands.

"Now go straight on as if nothing unusual were happening," he cautioned her. "I wish I could go to carry the bag, but two would attract more attention than one. After you leave I shall go out and look around. If that fellow remains I'll know that our ruse has worked."

"Well, good-by," Lucia said, tremulously. "If they take me and we do not meet again, remember that I shall always be grateful to you for—" She choked up and turned toward the stairs.

Back at the window, Gramling watched the man across the street. Suddenly another man under an umbrella approached him and the two stood close together as if conferring privately. The minutes passed. Gramling heard the lower door close after Lucia and with joy noted that the two men did not at that moment have their eyes on the house.

"Fine! fine!" he whispered, and his elation grew as the minutes passed and the men had not moved. Ten, fifteen, twenty minutes passed.

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A policeman approached the two men and all turned and looked at the door of the house.

Ten minutes later Gramling went down the stairs. The policeman had left, but the two men remained. They glanced at him casually as he came out, and then looked away. From a distant corner Gramling glanced back. They were still watching the house.

“Good! Good!” he chuckled, and he hurried toward the Subway.

CHAPTER XIX

AT eleven o'clock Lucia left the train at the station near Oaklawn and started to walk to the mansion, when suddenly from one of the rear cars she saw a man approaching.

It was Gramling, who ran forward, smiling triumphantly. "I saw that I'd have time to catch your train," he said. "I got on when you did, but kept out of sight. I thought you'd sleep sounder if I reported. You've given them the slip. They are still watching our house like a cat at a rat hole."

He took the bag and umbrella. The rain was ceasing.

"Oh, what a relief!" she cried, when he had explained more fully. "I think I'd be comparatively safe out here, if—if I may stay awhile."

"The safest place in the world," he declared. "No one would suspect your being here, and even if they came and searched the house I could find a place to hide you in a big house like that."

They walked on. The road was quite deserted. She had taken his arm and felt his damp sleeve.

"You are wet to the skin," she said. "It may make you ill."

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"It doesn't matter," he said, indifferently. "It is you we must look after to-night, Lucia."

"How very, very kind you are!" she said, huskily, and cleared her throat. She faced him, putting a hand on his breast and shoulder, and pausing.

"You are wet," she said again. "You walked to the Subway in that hardest downpour."

"It is nothing," he said. "Don't bother about me, Lucia. Thank God, you got away."

"You did it." She bore down on his arm as she began to walk on. "In all my troubles I've never had a helping hand before. With you I feel safe—absolutely safe, somehow. I can't explain it, but I do."

They were at the gates of Oaklawn now and went in. He unlocked the door and turned on the light.

"Shut the door," she said, and he obeyed, wondering if, after all, her fears had quite subsided.

"You've got to dry your clothes," she commanded, with a pretty air of dictatorship.

"We'll make another fire in the drawing-room. My feet are damp."

"Good!" he agreed, and went to make the fire. He found the material and started a big blaze in the fireplace. Placing a chair for her, he said: "Now sit here and dry your feet. I'll stand up and turn like a roast on a spit till I'm dry."

She laughed almost merrily. "Oh, I feel so safe—so safe!" she exclaimed. "Almost for the

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first time in years I feel immune from all harm."

He left her, and returned in a few minutes with a tray holding a bottle of fine old port and two glasses.

"Where did you get it?" she inquired.

"In the cellar," he answered. "You know Trimble said it was there and that the owner wouldn't mind if we used it. I've taken the professor at his word."

He filled the glasses, moved a little table up to her chair, and stood smiling, his glass in his hand. "To the downfall of your enemies!" he said.

"No," she corrected, "to the lifelong happiness and success of my one and only true friend—you!"

She drank, put her glass on the table, rose, and went to the piano. He wanted her to play, but was afraid she might not. Should he ask her to do so? He was afraid his mere voice might dispel the mood which seemed to possess her. She sat down. Her hands glided over the keys at first without response from the instrument, and then the music rose, swelled out, died down. Over mountains, vales, gorges, and dells of discord and harmony it swept and swayed. Stony peaks fell crashing under angry clouds—violets sang and whispered in sunlit meadows. Blue brooks gleamed and crooned. Gramling stood transfixed, his glass in an inert hand. Stealthily he sought his chair and sat down, his famished stare on the

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quaint figure at the piano. In removing his hat her wonderful hair had become loose and now hung down her back, a rare garment enmeshed with light and shadows. Presently she stopped playing, rose, and came to him.

"Now, my preserver," she said, smiling, "you have got to hear me out from beginning to end. I owe it to you, of all human beings on earth. You must listen."

She drew a great soft hassock forward and placed it close to his chair. He had risen at her approach, and when she was seated he sat down.

"But why must you tell me?" he asked, protestingly.

"Because you ought to know who you are helping to conceal like this, and have your choice about it. Do you know that you are committing an offense against the law for which you could be tried and condemned?"

He shook his head firmly. "What does that matter? Listen, Lucia. Did you not tell me that in the vision you had of Morten—this Gramling's brother—that you were advised to tell your troubles to no one?"

"Y-e-s, but—"

"That is enough," Gramling said. "There may be nothing in these occult visitations, and still there may be. Besides, I feel, Lucia, that I'd rather not hear it from your lips. It is painful—I know it."

"Nevertheless," putting her hand on his knee

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as confidently as a trusting child, and lifting a moist, half-dubious stare to his face—"nevertheless, I've made up my mind to tell you. I did it while playing just now."

"And I have made up my mind not to let you tell me," he said, with firmness. Then he lost control of himself and, bending forward, he took her face between his hands and slowly kissed her eyes, one by one and then her lips, her cheeks, her hair. She submitted for a moment, and then drew his hands down, sighed profoundly and stood up before him.

"If you knew all about me," she faltered—"all—all, everything, you'd know this—that I ought not to let you kiss me, and you'd know that I ought not to let you—let you love me. This is wrong—this being with you here in this heaven of a place which is only a gate to the hole of hell which I must sooner or later occupy."

"That can't be," he panted, taking her hands and trying to draw her to him. "I'd conquer the earth rather than let you go back into pain and suffering."

"You are helpless; so am I," she said, her lips twitching at the corners.

"I'll hide you here, here forever!" he cried, impulsively.

"Here? How absurd!" she cried. "Our work will end; Mr. Gramling will be back and—" She said no more, her voice trailing away in the silence of the great room.

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He stood gazing at her, undecided. Dare he tell her who he was? An invisible hand seemed to be placed on his lips, a voice from the vast stillness of infinity seemed to whisper a like command. As man of wealth and her employer, she would quit him all the sooner. Their supposed poverty and adversity had won her to him, if, indeed, she was won, and in his despair he doubted that.

"Now, it's late," she said, "and we are to work to-morrow. I am tired; the excitement has undone me. I'll try the lounge again, if you'll get the coverings, you bold burglar of wine and things."

"Not the lounge," he said, "for this is to be your home, for a while, anyway. Come with me and I'll show you the rooms upstairs. There are a lot, and you may take your choice."

"Very well," she said. "I shall like it. I'll have you take a note to Mrs. Carr. I can trust her, and she will pack my trunk and send it here by express."

"No," he reflected, as they were at the foot of the grand stairway in the central hall, "your enemies would be on the watch even for that, you may be sure. They will be turning the East Side upside down for a clue to your whereabouts, and they might note the removal of a trunk and follow it up."

"True," she agreed. "See, how you help me. But I must have my things. What shall I do about it? I dare not go in now."

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"Make a list of the most important," Gramling suggested, "and I'll fetch them out a few at a time. Mrs. Carr will put them up."

"Very well, but I don't like to bother you."

"Bother me? My God! Lucia, don't you understand?" he cried. "Can't you see that your trouble is mine? Don't you know that I adore you—that this persecution of you is making you dearer than ever. I love you, Lucia, and—"

"But you mustn't!" She began the ascent of the stairs, her hand on the wide mahogany balustrade. "You really mustn't. I don't want to curse your life forever. It was a bad day for you when I entered it."

He was tempted to detain her, but there was something in her regal poise, step, and steady, forward gaze that forbade it. Besides, there was an ominous finality in her tone that chilled the faint hope that their isolation together had roused.

"Where are the servants' quarters?" she asked, when the second floor was reached.

"At the top," he answered. "But why do you ask?"

"Because I think I ought to go up there."

"You sha'n't!" he cried. "There are the best rooms, overlooking the Hudson." He pointed across the corridor to several doors. "The first one was Morten's, adjoining mi—adjoining Gramling's."

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"Morten's!" Lucia exclaimed. "How do you know it was his?"

Gramling hesitated, avoiding her stare. Then he got out: "Trimble told me. He was a constant visitor here at one time."

"Is it open? May I look at it?"

"Of course." He opened the door of the room in question, and lighted it.

Lucia entered the great chamber and stood looking about admiringly. "Oh, it is so nice and so luxurious! I'd like to stay here. In fact, I feel as if—as if he would want me to. Why, it seems to me that he—that he—"

She started, turned around quickly, and stared at the doorway as if quite bewildered.

"What is the matter?" Gramling inquired

"Why, I thought—I—I was sure I heard him speak."

"You fancied it," Gramling said, to allay her excitement.

"It was exactly as it was when he spoke before," Lucia contended, "like, and yet not like, a voice. Clearly he said: 'You must stay. I wish it. I'll try to protect you. I'm here often.'"

"Strange," Gramling said. "Well, this room is all right, if you don't mind. I was going to suggest that you take the suite which Trimble said was that of Gramling's mother. It is on a corner, well lighted, and has a wonderful view. Shall I show it to you?"

She accompanied him to the other rooms.

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"They are lovely," she said, "but somehow I feel as if I've been invited—actually invited to occupy the other."

He left her at the door to descend for the bag containing her things, and when he brought it he found her at a window looking out into the night. She turned as he entered and put the bag on a table.

"What are you going to do?" she asked. "It is too late for the last train, isn't it?"

"Yes, but I can hire an automobile and chauffeur at the village and quickly reach the Subway. Are you not afraid to be here alone?"

"Not in the slightest." She laughed, beginning to unpack the bag. "You will need this if you want to bring my things out in the morning. Wait, I'll write a note to Mrs. Carr."

He gave her a paper and a pencil and watched her deft fingers as she wrote.

"But you are tired, aren't you?" she asked, considerately. "I'm sorry to put you to so much trouble."

"Oh no." He laughed. "Besides, I want to see how the land lies and report to you. If I am late to-morrow, don't worry. It will be because I am waiting to see what the detectives' next step will be."

"Well, good night," she said, giving him the note. There was a frown of indecision on her brow, and he paused.

"What is it, Lucia?" he asked, anxiously.

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"I am wondering," she said, "if, after all, we ought to let Mrs. Carr know where I am. I trust her, but I have not told her where we are working. She only knows that it is somewhere out of the city."

"I'd advise against it," he said. "She is a friendly soul, but the police have a way of grilling witnesses and she might be browbeaten into—"

"Yes, don't tell her!" Lucia interrupted. "It is best for no one to know. Tell her I am safe; that will be sufficient. Good night."

"Good night," he said, taking her hands. "Now sleep well, and don't be afraid. The house is as strong as a fortress."

CHAPTER XX

IT was two o'clock when Gramling reached the Spring Street station and walked toward his room. The recreation park in front of the house was quite deserted, the recent rain having dispersed the usual bench loungers. The clouds were thinning out and the rain seemed over. Cautiously Gramling peered down the street in front of the house. At first he saw no one, but presently he descried a man in the doorway where he had last seen the guard standing.

"Good!" Gramling muttered. "They still think she is there."

Crossing the street, he entered the house and went up to his room, deciding not to wake Mrs. Carr for the delivery of the note. But she happened to be awake, and in wrapper and slippers she stealthily crept up the stairs.

"I haven't been able to sleep," she whispered, entering his room and softly closing the door. "I ran up to see her, and found she had got away. Is she safe?"

"Quite safe," he said.

"Oh, I'm glad—I'm glad!" the woman cried. "I like Miss Lingle and I'm sure she is innocent

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of wrongdoing. I think she is persecuted by someone, that's all. Several men have been watching the front. One is still there."

When she had read the note she took his bag. "I'll pack it to-night so as not to delay you in the morning," she said. "I could not sleep, anyway, as excited as I am."

He sat down to wait for the bag and she went to Lucia's room. Presently she brought the filled bag in. "I'm glad you haven't told me where she is," she said. "I don't want to know, for in case I'm questioned I can tell a straight story."

"Yes, that is best," Gramling agreed. "She is safe and comfortable, for the present at all events."

"They will be apt to come around in the morning," Mrs. Carr went on. "They are sure she is here and will want to take her. I can't imagine what her trouble is, but it is great."

He made no comment and, thinking that he wanted to go to bed, she left him.

He waked early that morning and, taking the valise, he went down to the street. Had he known that the guard was so near the entrance he would have waited till later. As it was, the man met him within a few yards of the door. He was short and stocky, had shrewd, dark eyes under heavy brows, was of middle age and shabbily dressed. To Gramling's surprise the fellow tipped his hat humbly and said:

"I beg your pardon, sir; I don't like to beg,

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but I'm hungry. Could you give me a few cents to buy me a cup of coffee and a sandwich?"

Gramling was equal to his own role. He frowned and stood as if deliberating while he eyed the man from head to foot. "I'm hungry myself," he said. "Times are hard, and I'm out of work."

"Ah, so am I," was the answer. "Well, never mind. I'll walk over to Broadway, where there is more money." Here the man looked at the house Gramling had just left. "Rooms to let there, I see. Many vacancies?"

"I don't know—and I don't care," Gramling said. "I guess I'll be put out soon."

"Ah, that's bad—sorry I asked you for help. Good luck to you."

"Thanks," Gramling walked into the little park and sat down on one of the benches. Presently he saw the man sauntering back toward the doorway in which he had stood the night before.

Ready to go to Oaklawn, still Gramling waited in the park to see what would be done, if anything. He felt the need of breakfast, but would not risk leaving his point of observation to get it. At about ten o'clock a taxicab, an unusual sight in that quarter, drove up and stopped near the man to whom Gramling had spoken. It contained a policeman and another man more neatly attired than the one on guard, who stepped up to them and began to talk. They remained together for half an hour, then another policeman

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walked up briskly, nodded, and looked at the rooming house. The others got out of the cab and all four went straight to the door. They rang and were admitted by Mrs. Carr herself.

Moving up closer, Gramling sat on another bench and watched. Half an hour later the men reappeared, looks of fury and disappointment on their faces. The better-dressed man in civilian clothes was swearing at the other.

"You lie! You fell asleep and let her give you the slip. I'll report you, and your head goes off!"

"It was the rain," Gramling heard the accused man faltering. "I—"

But Gramling could hear no more. He saw the four men crowd themselves into the cab, which was rapidly driven away. Hastening across the street, Gramling met Mrs. Carr on the stoop. Without a word she led him into her room and closed the door.

"Do you know?" she panted, still pale and nervous.

He nodded. "What did they do?"

"Searched the house from top to bottom," Mrs. Carr said. "They peered into every nook and cranny. I had to show Miss Lingle's room with the rest. One of the plain-clothes men saw a dress of hers on the closet door and said: 'This was her room, all right. I know that damned skirt. I've followed it three thousand miles.'

"Oh, they were furious! They swore in my face when I told them I didn't know a thing

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about her or where she went. They tried to pin me down—they threatened me with arrest, but, you see, I really don't know anything about Miss Lingle, and I told such a straight story that they gave up browbeating me. The tumbled condition of the room satisfied them that she was gone, and I guess they won't bother me any more. Tell me this, Mr. Stirling. I'm very, very fond of her. Is she safe?"

"For the present, quite!" he said. "I'll bring you news of her now and then."

"Well, she met a good, kind friend when she met you, Mr. Stirling," was the woman's parting words as he was leaving. "But for you she'd be in trouble again."

"I've really done very little," he lingered to say; "I, myself, know nothing about her past, but I trust her fully, and would do a thousand times more to aid her if I could."

"I've never been able to understand her," Mrs. Carr said, reflectively. "She was always asking me such queer questions."

"What, for instance?" Gramling put his bag down to encourage her to go on.

"Why, for one thing she has asked me many times, and quite seriously, too, if I thought she was insane."

"Insane!" Gramling scoffed. "She has the most level head I've met for many a day."

"I think so, too, and that's why her continual questions about that seemed so absurd. It is the

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persistent way she asks about it that puzzles me. She will come down where I'm at work in the kitchen and talk, but it won't be a minute before she will face me and ask if I've ever seen anything about her to indicate that her mind is not sound."

Gramling frowned thoughtfully. "Perhaps some of her family have had trouble of that sort," he said. "There is a superstitious idea held by many morbid people that insanity is hereditary. I had it once myself. That may be the trouble with her, and if it is I'll try to talk it out of her," and, taking up his bag, he left.

CHAPTER XXI

IT was past noon when he finally arrived at Oaklawn. Entering at the front door he went into the upper library, but saw no one. Going down to the other, he found no one there also. He went back to the main floor and looked through the drawing-rooms, kitchen, and dining room, but without finding Lucia. Then he be-thought himself of her room upstairs and went to it. The door was closed and he rapped on it. For a moment he waited, and, as there was no sound from within, he rapped again. Then he heard her voice.

"Who is it?" came in startled, far-away tones.

"I, Lucia!" he answered, and the door was opened and she stood pale and quivering before him.

"Oh, I was afraid—afraid—" she began, giving him her hands impulsively and clinging to his as if for support. "I thought it was those men. I heard you walking below, and—and—"

"I see," he said, gently. "It was due to your excitement. That was most natural after all you've been through."

"I spent a stupid night," she went on, with a

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little flush of shame. "I could not control my fears. I got to thinking that the detectives might have followed me, after all, and I expected them every minute. Mr. Stirling, I guess I'm not as brave as I thought I was. The idea of being alone here in this vast house seemed to overpower me. I tried to read, to play, to reason, but my philosophy failed me. I gave up the idea of sleeping, for I knew I couldn't be calm enough."

"So you haven't slept," he deplored. "Not at all?"

"Not at all. What did you find out?"

He told her all that had happened, and added, comfortingly, "You see, they are completely off the track and will never think of your being here in a deserted old house like this."

"Ah, you don't know those men, and the money they are paid!" She sighed. "I've never been in a safer place, I'm sure, but—but— Oh, I'm so weary of it all! If I could see the faintest gleam of hope for the future it would be different, but I see none. I am a blight on the lives of everyone I meet—even you, even you."

"Even me?" he scoffed. "Why, Lucia, how could you be a blight on my life when you are what you are to me?"

"Ah, that's the trouble!" She turned toward the stairs and, with a stately step and in advance of him, she descended to the lower floor.

"What did you mean by that last remark,

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Lucia?" he pleaded, as they reached her writing table and she sank into her chair and listlessly took up a pen and dipped it.

Reclining her head against her hand, she sighed again. "I've let you learn to love me," she faltered. "I knew it was wrong. In the sight of Heaven I knew I had no right to receive your attentions, and yet I was so lonely, so sad and troubled, and to be with you was so comforting, that, being only a weak woman, Mr. Stirling, I gave in to it. But you say you *actually love me*, and perhaps you do. In fact, I am sure of it, and that is why you are bound to be unhappy. Ah, and unhappy through me—that's the hard part of it."

"Unhappy?" He sat on the edge of her table and took her limp hand in his. "How could I be happy when you are in trouble? I don't want happiness at such a price. My soul is bound to yours forever. I'll go where you go. If they had taken you last night I'd have been at their heels." He raised her hand to his lips and was about to kiss it when she firmly drew it down.

"No," she protested, sadly, her eyes raised to his, "I must not let you do that. I've done wrong enough already. You must forget me—you must tear me out of your thoughts. When our work here is over—"

"I'll never give you up," he declared, almost fiercely. "Never. Let that end it. I dare not ask if you care at all for me—I am unworthy of

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it, Lucia. But I shall adore you to the end of life."

"And on—" she added. "Somehow I am becoming more sure than ever of another life than this."

"Yes, and on forever," he echoed, fervently. "I, too, for hundreds of reasons, am convinced that our lives do not end here."

"Therein lies my sole hope," she faltered. "If there is not another life this one is a fiendish scheme of Infinity. Oh, how comforting is the thought! Even to talk about it makes me feel better—you always make me feel safe and cheerful, anyway. Are we to work this afternoon?"

"No, not after your night of unrest," he all but commanded. "Let's lounge about and read and talk. Would you play, I wonder?"

"Yes—for you," she answered, languidly; "not now, but later. I feel so restful! It is as if my spiritual part were lifting itself out of my carnal being and floating off into untold ecstasy. I seem to feel the very essence of my dear brother folding me in his arms. Oh, Ashley, Ashley, you are near me! I know it. Don't worry about me. I'll come out safe. See, see how happy I am!

"Oh, pardon me!" she said to Gramling. "I actually forgot where I was. I've been too much troubled to eat and have had no breakfast, but I am becoming hungry. Let me make some tea."

He had missed his breakfast that morning and

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was hungry himself, so together they went to the big kitchen and, like children playing at house-keeping, they prepared their luncheon

When they had finished eating in the cozy breakfast room adjoining a small conservatory, the plants and flowers of which were dying for lack of attention, and he sat smoking opposite her, he suddenly noted a shadow fall across her face.

"What is it?" he asked, softly, persuasively.

"Nothing," she answered, drawing herself more erect and essaying a smile. "I'm silly—silly here lately. I wonder if this struggle of mine is getting the best of me."

"But you had some disagreeable thought, Lucia," he insisted. "I saw it in your face just then."

She sighed; her long lashes flickered undecidedly and then she said: "I want to ask you a question, Mr. Stirling, and I don't know how to do it and get the right answer. You are so polite—so afraid of hurting me, that frankly I think you would fib to me, and yet it is something I want to know."

He was chilled and abashed. Had she found some reason to suspect that he was not the man he represented himself as being? Perhaps so. And in that case, what was he to say? It might cause her to leave him, and that he could not bear.

"Now, I've hurt *your* feelings," Lucia deplored, noting his suddenly averted gaze and the silence brooding over him.

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"Oh no, no!" he declared. "But, tell me, what is it that you want to know?"

She avoided his eyes now. The slender fingers toying with the corner of her napkin became rigid. "I want you to tell me something about myself. I don't want any evasion—or subterfuge. I want your opinion, your honest opinion right from your heart. You've seen me off and on for some time. We've talked together, worked together, and amused ourselves together, and—and—"

Her voice quivered helplessly and died. She coughed, wiped her set lips daintily, and exhaled a lingering breath.

"Go on, please, Lucia," he urged, gently. "I see that you are agitated, but perhaps you'd better go on."

"I want to know if," she gulped, "if in all your contact with me you have seen or heard anything that would lead you to think that my mind is unbalanced?"

"Unbalanced!" He laughed. "Your mind unbalanced? How absolutely absurd! Why, Lucia, your mind is as clear as the mind of Socrates was just before he died. You can't be in earnest."

"But I am," she affirmed. "At this moment I think I am sane—I really do, but in my worst moods I sometimes fear, a little, that I may not be. Certain things which I have not yet told you make me doubt at times."

"You must get the idea out of your head." He

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smiled. "It has perhaps become a little obsession with you. When you are alone and in special trouble you let it creep on you. Take my advice, Lucia, and simply throw the thought away every time it comes."

"I really believe you mean it." She breathed in relief and smiled. "Oh, what a load you have lifted from me! When the thought comes again I am coming straight to you and ask you to repeat the words you have just spoken. I almost think you hypnotize me. When I'm with you I feel—feel—"

"How, Lucia?" as she paused, half smiling.

"Why, as if no harm could possibly touch me while you are near. Never in my life has anyone else made me feel so. Oh, I'm happy! I want to tell you what my happiness is like, but I can't. It seems to have naught to do with my body. My soul seems, somehow, to meet yours and dissolve into it and nestle down into a bed of actual bliss."

"There, there, you have it," he intoned, impulsively. "It is like my love for you. I swear, Lucia, that no earthly man has ever loved a woman as I do you. Passion is a part of all human love, it is said, but I swear my love for you transcends passion, unless the soul has a passion of its own."

"It has," Lucia declared, "but there is no comparison between it and the other. One is of the grave; the other eternal."

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Suddenly the bell of the front door rang and Lucia started, stared, and caught hold of Gramling's hands.

'Oh," she cried, "there they are! They have already run me down. I was afraid of it—they are so, so shrewd."

"Absurd!" He smiled. "It may only be some peddler wanting to sell something, or a poor man out of work. Ah, why didn't I think of it? It is most likely Trimble. It is the hour he would naturally call, and he said we might expect him at any time. He was charmed with you and said so."

CHAPTER XXII

IT was indeed Trimble whom Gramling admitted, after peering out, recognizing the professor's car on the drive and hastily informing Lucia that her fears might be allayed at once.

"Hard at it, of course," Trimble greeted him, jestingly.

"Not at present. Come in," Gramling answered.

Trimble put his hat down on a hall table and drew off his gloves.

"Is she still here?" he inquired. "The beautiful one?"

"Yes, in the breakfast room. Will you go back there?"

"Not just yet. Let's stop for a moment in the library. She does not know of our psychic-research experiments yet, does she?"

"No; I have told her nothing so far."

"Things are happening at my end," the professor said, laughing. "Pierre has been giving his wife a lot of trouble and she asked me not to come to the house any more, but she now comes to me at my home and we really work better there. Annette doesn't want to deceive her husband, but she says she simply cannot get away from the

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spiritualistic demands on her. Recently when she was with me I had my stenographer sit behind a curtain and take down every word that was spoken. Some of it is remarkable in its type-written form. I'll show it to you sometime. By the way, you know when we saw her last she said something about Miss Lingle being in special danger. Was there anything in that?"

"Decidedly." And thereupon Gramling took his friend into his confidence and related all that had happened the day and night before.

"Strange," Trimble muttered, "and it was last night that she came here?"

"Yes."

"Well, would you believe it? Annette came to me hurriedly yesterday evening—said she had been worried all day; had heard voices and seen visions. 'The beautiful one,' she said, was in the greatest agony of mind and in imminent peril. I put her to sleep, thinking it might calm her, but her excitement continued. Fiends in human shape were gathering about Miss Lingle. That went on for an hour or so, and then she began to clap her hands and laugh. 'The bearded man,' as she always calls you, was aiding the lady to escape and all was well. So, you see, through Annette I really was informed of your doings at the time they were happening."

"I see," Gramling said. "Was that all?"

"Yes, I attempted to find out from Annette the nature of Miss Lingle's trouble, but she in-

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formed me sharply that I was meddling with something that did not concern me."

"Yes, we have no right to inquire into that," Gramling said, coldly. "She will tell us if she wishes it known, otherwise it is her secret. I am not sure that I care. I rather like the idea of knowing she is all right without proof or explanation."

"Good! That is the proper feeling," Trimble said. "Now let me shake hands with her. I can't stop long. I have a lot to attend to in town. Poor, dear lady! As nice as it is here I'm sorry for her, for she can't get out much, I suppose."

"Not at present," Gramling said. "We have the library work to do, and that helps."

"Yes, but even that can't last, my friend," Trimble said, grimly. "And what is she going to do in the end? What are *you* going to do?"

"I?" Gramling started and colored.

"Yes, you, my poor fellow! For you are—well, you know what I mean."

"I don't deny it," Gramling admitted, frankly. "My life is wrapped up in hers—wholly, completely."

"It could not be otherwise." The professor smiled. "I have never seen people better mated. It does my eyes good to see you together. Come, where is she?"

They found her at her table in the upper library. "Tut, tut, my child!" Trimble chided her, as he

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bowed over her hand. "You must not work to-day. You look a little pale, and are nervous. You must get about on the outside. The estate around here is extensive. I walked over it once with the owner. There are some wild wooded spots between here and the river that are as dense as a jungle."

"Yes, she must walk more."

"Did you know"—Lucia began—"did Mr. Stirling tell you that I'm the caretaker here now?"

"He told me that you are living here, and that is exactly right. The journeys in and out were too much for you. I hope you will like it."

"I found my way to the wine cellar the other night when we were wet from the rain," Gramling said, a significant twinkle in his eyes. "I took you at your word and robbed our absent host."

"Good! Gramling won't care a rap. I stand for that—that goes in the library contract. When am I to hear you play, Miss Lingle?"

"Some day"—Lucia smiled dreamily—"but not now. I'm not in the mood to-day. The feeling comes and goes. When it is not with me I am like a machine, disgusting to myself and everyone else."

"Then I must be on my way," Trimble answered. "You must let me come some evening before long. You must be lonely, and Stirling and I will try to amuse you."

"Thank you very much," she answered, softly, giving him her hand as he was leaving.

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Gramling came back to her after he had seen his friend depart.

"I forgot," she said. "I was going to ask him something. He is a psychologist, I think you said, also, a—a— Did you not say that he was a noted alienist?"

"Yes, Lucia"—Gramling sat down by her suddenly, caught her hand, and pressed it reprov-ingly—"but didn't you promise me that you were going to dig that obsession up and throw it away?"

"Oh, I forgot—I remember now! Well, I'll keep my word."

"And not mention it to Trimble?"

"No, I'll not mention it. I'll remember next time. Besides, you say that I am sane, and who could be a better judge, having seen me as you have?"

"Yes, drop it, Lucia! Drop it!" Gramling commanded. "Your fears are morbid and due to this persecution and your isolation. Poor, dear girl! What can I do for you?"

"Nothing more than you are doing." She smiled in his eyes. "I'm happy with you. I'm going to play for you now. I want to. Stay in here. In this great closed house my playing will sound better at this distance."

She had reached the door when she suddenly paused, looked back at him, and slowly retraced her steps to his side.

"There is one thing which has just struck me," she said, probing his face with her frank eyes. "I

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think Professor Trimble suspects that I am in trouble."

"Why do you think so, Lucia?" Gramling asked, with an all but visible start.

"Because he spoke as he did about my need of amusement. Oh, I know what a man of that courtesy and refinement would do under normal conditions. He didn't propose entertaining me in the city, but said you and he would endeavor to amuse me *here*. That was exactly what one would say to an invalid or to—to one in confinement."

Gramling was at the end of his resources. He decided to speak frankly.

"I think he does suspect something, Lucia," he said. "But I gather that he, like myself, has absolute faith in you. Lucia, we both know that whatever your trouble is you are not to blame, and we have made up our minds to defend you, to save you from your enemies at any cost."

"Oh, how good, how kind, how noble!" Lucia's eyes filled. "I'd rather have you both not understand all quite at present. But oh, how good you are! I've been without friends so long that it is sweet and soothing to have them—to find them like this when all the world has turned against me. Now—now, I'll play for you. And I shall be fancying a meadow of flowers and streams, such as Ashley and I played in when we were children."

"Thank you," Gramling said, fervently. "I'll sit here till you return."

"No, you won't." She smiled dreamily. "For

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you will be with me in the meadow—actually with me in the meadow. Remember that and you will understand my playing.”

He sat at her worktable and lowered his head upon its cool surface. He heard her playing. The waves of indescribable melody swept through the great house. The sense of soothing sleep crept over him. For a moment he struggled against it, but the effort was painful and he relaxed and slept.

It was a dream. He was on an Alpine hillside. Above him loomed a peak of ice, up which roped tourists and guides crept like flies dragging strands of soiled web. Between him and the foot of the mountain of ice stretched a smooth glacier punctured here and there with basins of bluish water. Below lay a valley on which a midsummer sun beat, and under its trees he strolled till suddenly a meadow was before him, a meadow filled with flowers, bubbling water that sang and whispered and laughed. Clouds white as snow like the pinfeathers of the blue sky's protecting wings floated down to thirsty petals. Crawling things on the stems of flowers stared with wisdom surpassing man's in their tiny eyes. And some distance from him stood Lucia, her arms full of flowers. He tried to get to her, but tenacious vines and briers tied themselves about his feet. She looked at him, smiled, and advanced. She seemed to step upon flowers that bowed under her tread, and then stood proudly erect, as from a duty done. On

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she came, and when she was quite near he saw that she held an apron full of flowers all of which were dancing merrily. She called out to him. And then he waked. The music had ceased. He sat up and turned toward the door of the *salon*. Presently Lucia appeared, walking toward him exactly as she had walked in his dream. Her arms were extended as if she still held the flowers in her apron.

"Oh, aren't they beautiful!" she cried, her eyes ablaze, her cheeks flushed.

"Of what are you speaking, Lucia?" he asked, nonplused.

"Why, the flowers. Hear them sing. See them dance. Take them, take them, and I'll gather some more."

"Why, dear," he cried, perplexed, "you have no flowers."

"No flowers? Why, Mr. Stirling, do you say these are not flowers—if not, then what are they, pray? Is this not a rose and that a lily?"

"No," he said, gently. "You are dreaming. I was dreaming. I fell asleep. I am ashamed to admit it, but I—"

She stared at him fixedly, blankly, helplessly. Then she looked at her hands and her mouth fell open in slow surprise.

"Why, you are right—they are not flowers. They are—are gone. She turned suddenly and sat down on a lounge, her hands locked in her lap. He stood in front of her. He touched her hair.

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She looked up at him. He had never seen such a woebegone expression as that which now clutched the fine lines of her face.

"Now, Mr. Stirling," she said, tremulously and in a husky voice, "now you understand."

"Understand what, Lucia?"

"What I meant when I said that I was afraid I was insane. You have the proof. It is a horrible thing to think of, but it is true. I was once at a—a trial of a—a—poor girl who was charged with lunacy, and there an experienced psychologist testified that in his opinion all persons who have high imaginations are partially insane."

"That may be true," Gramling said. "You have a high imagination, but you are in the best of company—Shakespeare, all the other great poets, and the best of the world's artists."

"Yes, yes, but the psychologist testified that when one reached the point at which one was unable to tell the difference between a real thing and one imagined he was insane. He cited a case of a painter who used to stamp the features of a model on his brain, dismiss him, and then sit painting while he imagined the model was before him. It was all well at first, but finally he could not possibly tell whether a model was before him or not. At first he could assure himself by feeling for the model, and thus deciding whether he was or was not there. But the time came when he declared he could actually feel the absent model's body, and then he was insane."

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"But you are not, and you mustn't think it," Gramling declared, seating himself by her and taking her limp hands in his. "There is a new science dawning, Lucia. Trimble is a student of it, and I, myself, believe in it. The realm of the subconsciousness is a marvelous thing. Now listen. While you were playing you pictured a meadow of flowers in which you were walking."

"Yes, as I told you." She twined her thin fingers around his strong ones like an eager, nervous child hanging upon his words.

"Well, I was asleep and dreamed it, too. I saw you with the flowers coming to me. I saw you more vividly even than I see you now. I was awake—fully awake—when you stopped playing, I'm sure, but I cannot tell now whether when you first appeared you held flowers or not. The line of demarcation between the two states of consciousness is very fine. Lucia, I am as mad as you are, and I know that I am mentally sound."

"Oh, oh, oh!" she cried, eagerly. "Then in the case of the—the girl on trial for—for lunacy, she may not have had full justice. The jury—oh, I remember them so well—they were a heavy-faced lot of coarse men, a barkeeper, a butcher—oh, an awful stupid group! They cross-questioned their victim for hours and hours and grinned and winked at one another when they thought they had tripped her up. The judge told her— But never mind. Then my thinking that I held the flowers when my hands really were empty—"

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"Was nothing, absolutely nothing of consequence." Gramling smiled. "When I was a child I used to dream that I had found some rare thing, diamonds, pearls of unusual beauty. In my dream I'd tightly clasp them in my hands, and after I waked I'd still feel them in my fingers."

"Oh, how you comfort me!" Lucia cried. "I've been afraid of myself. For years I've lived two lives—one of dreams, the other of grim and painful reality."

"You are fortunate in being able to have both," Gramling answered, "but the dream life is the better, and perhaps, after all, it is the ultimate reality. Men of common minds say that genius is madness—you are a genius, Lucia, and should not be measured by ordinary standards."

"Thank you. Now I shall work." She smiled. "You are the best friend I ever had."

"I thought we were going to take a half-holiday," he protested, following her to her table.

"No, we must earn our pay," she said. "Besides, I always feel better when I am at work, and afterward."

CHAPTER XXIII

ONE evening, three days later, Gramling met Trimble by appointment on a corner of a street near DuFresne's house.

"Pierre's away," the professor explained, as they walked on. "He has gone to Boston for a few days, and his wife asked me to come to her to-night. I could not explain in my note, but I have been considerably concerned about Miss Lingle's trouble, and I've been wondering if we might not be able to help her."

"Help her? How?" Gramling said. "We don't even know what her trouble is; and, so far, she seems just a little reluctant to explain."

"That oughtn't to deter us," Trimble answered. "Through Annette I have ferreted out several otherwise inexplicable matters, and I have an idea that if we would set ourselves to it we might be able to help Miss Lingle."

"You mean—?"

"I mean that the idea of your dead brother and hers sending messages to us regarding her sad plight is significant, and I thought I'd propose to you that we make some inquiries to-night."

"I thought of it myself," Gramling responded,

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"but the fact that it is a sensitive subject with Miss Lingle kept me from bringing it up."

"Well, I'll tell you what we'll do," Trimble proposed. "We'll make an opening, so to speak, and see if anything comes of it—that is, if you don't mind."

"That will do," consented Gramling. "But I hope you will be very careful."

Annette met them at the door. "Ah, you are here!" she said, with some relief evinced in her tone. "I t'ought you change the intention."

"So you get impatient, Annette," the professor said, with a laugh. "You are getting interested in our research."

"Ah!" claspings and wringing her hands, "you don't know, monsieur—nobody knows! I am so strange, so vare strange! When I do de house-work, scrub de floor, milk de cow, make de butter, and wash and iron, and de garden *aussi*, I am a beast—I crawl de ground like a pig, talk to my neighbor like a hen when she scratch for worms in de ground. But when de sleep time come—ah! I die till—till I get loose, monsieur. Huh! my Pierre say when we die we be dead. Ah, well, maybe Pierre, but me—no— I know, monsieur. My body part been all de same as dead many time. I can't tell you—my tongue stay still in de mouth when I try. Are you ready? Come."

She preceded them into the dark parlor, drew down the blinds, and sank into the chair she usually occupied.

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"All right," Trimble said to her. "You are drowsy; your eyes are like lead; you are sleepy—sleepy—sleepy!" He paused a moment and then said to Gramling: "She's off. She does it herself. To sit in that chair seems sufficient of late."

Annette was breathing softly, her head in a comfortable position.

"Oh!" they heard her exclaiming. "Oh, oh, oh!" as if she were surprised over something she saw.

"Now, listen," Trimble whispered, touching Gramling on the knee. "Note her quick transition to good English. That is one of the most remarkable things about her. Now, Annette," raising his voice, "are you willing to talk with me?"

"Oh, oh!" Annette continued to murmur in tones of delight. "They draw nearer, many, many, hosts of them and all so beautiful—all so young! There are no old ones. The masks they once hid behind lie buried in the dust of earth."

"Do you recognize anyone, Annette?" the professor went on, in an almost purring tone.

"Yes, the two—always together. Brothers? No, it seems not—brothers of the lovers? Yes."

"Morten and Ashley?" suggested Trimble.

"Oh, don't ask me names ever again. Names confuse them. They have feeling, emotion, but no language. Language is mere vibration from mushy tongues pivoted in grinning, rotting skulls. Ah, how can I explain to you, who crouch there while I float, a butterfly of soul over blossoms of

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eternal spirit? You in your filthy robes from the hide of dead and eaten animals, while I—I— But why try to make that driveling claptrap of a mouth of mine work so far away? For what purpose? You, too, will be cradled here, and know as much as I."

"But the two friends," Trimble asked, under his breath in his eagerness. "Do you still see them?"

"See them? See them? Yes, they are first of all," Annette answered. "Perhaps because of you and your interest in the—the other one. I forget who—they don't give it to me to remember. Ah, now they do! The musical soul in the great mansion sad and to-night alone. I remember now—the beautiful one which the Ashley spirit loves so dearly that he cannot leave the earth although drawn—drawn to the center like all the rest—I as well. Ah yes—I as well! Tell me, you owl-eyed hunchback of a scientist, will you not kill it with some opiate?"

"Kill it? Kill what, Annette?" Trimble asked.

"The putrid mass to which my ropes are tied. Ah, but already the two friends rebuke me! I am to stay and work, and sleep and dream by turns till my signal flashes. All are signaled. Indeed, they say I am a lucky one, for in my dreams I have a foot over the border."

"She will talk of herself all night if I let her," Trimble whispered, touching Gramling's knee. Then, louder: "Annette, tell me about the two

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friends. Are they willing to speak to me about the musical soul—the beautiful one?”

Annette was silent save for the whispered words, “What, what do you say?” which was almost inaudible and seemed to be addressed to her dream companions rather than to her questioner. “I understand, dear ones—understand you, but how can I make *it* say it? Can the wind harp’s music be made with hammers on a boiler of iron?”

“But try, won’t you, Annette?” Trimble pleaded. “This is important.”

“Yes, ah yes,” sighing. “I’ll try, but lead me. It helps, your questions do, a little. They check my flying toward the center.”

“Very well, I understand,” Trimble’s voice shook in professional eagerness as he bent forward and went on, “Are they—is Ashley, the brother, willing to let me know the nature of his sister’s trouble?”

“Wait, wait! He is agitated. His—his vibrations blind me. Yes, he is trying to give it to me through the earth memories he retains. He makes me see what he was forced to behold. Ah, they come too fast—the pictures. I am under Italian skies. A boy and a girl so happy! He loves art, she music. They paint and play together. Ah, so much alike, the two—never apart! A great fortune is for them by the will of their father, who was twice married. Yes, I will tell of the son mothered by the first wife. How could

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one forget a husk so filled with hell itself? Ah, what a villain that! I see him in a bank—vaults of gold and bonds around him. Smirking, servile attendants. What a withered carcass his—without one gleam of the light within! Already rich, from a father's bounty, he hungers for all the rest of the money. A line in the bequest he treasures. Ah, I think I understand, you unhappy Ashley one, blazing now so red in your anger. Yes, the line says that if the two children die the first brother is to have all. That line is his life. He sees it in his sleep and when awake. The scoundrel! The knave!"

Here Annette paused. She seemed to sleep more deeply, for she snored audibly.

"Come, come, Annette!" Trimble commanded, sharply. "What more do you see?"

"The miser again. The bank. A telegram. The Ashley one is dying under Italian skies. I swear to you, hunchback, that I see the villa, the beautiful room, doctors, nurses, the dying lad, with the clear sight of a new-born babe. Babies see better than their elders, I am told to say. At the bedside the beautiful one. Too deeply crushed she to comprehend. Ah, but she does later at the tomb. Ah, how wonderful now! How can I make my husk give it to the four-footed intelligence. I can't!"

"But try, please do, Annette," Trimble urged beneath his breath, in tense excitement. "What do you see?"

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“Why, I see the thing they are putting away banked over with flowers bleeding at the stems. The people look at that, but not at the other. Fools, blind men and women looking at *that* and not at—at— Oh, all-pervading Light, I thank thee for this sight—this promise to all thy creatures.”

“What is it that you see, Annette?” the professor begged, softly, insistently. “Try, try to tell me.”

“Why, I see—I see that which rises like mist from the bier. It wraps its glorious folds about the fair girl, pale as the moon, robed in black. It tries to soothe. It even weeps. I swear those tears are globules of light compared to which the beams of all suns would be arrows of darkness. Oh Father of Light, shall I be light like unto that? Oh, oh, oh!” There was a long pause.

“Try to remember me and my efforts to know, Annette,” the professor said, in a voice thick with suspense. “You almost give me your view. Tell me more. What next?”

“The beautiful one does not comprehend. Her eyes are on the flowers, the tumbling clods, the man in priestly robes. The holy mist is—is lifting. It cannot stay. It is gone. No, no, for there it is again with a million others on the horizon of the great, round—allness.”

“What next—what next, Annette?” asked Trimble, his throbbing hand on Gramling’s knee.

“The ship—the ocean,” said the medium,

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dreamily. "The black-robed nun—no, it is she. It is the beautiful one sailing for America—for America. O God! O God! Why permit it? And she a dove so wounded! Is evil the work of God or God's enemy? They know not even here, but it is known at the center, they say."

There was another long pause. "What do you see now, Annette?"

"No more; it is broken. I know. It is that Pierre. He spoils it. I feel him, the surly dog. He complains of me to a drunken pig from France. I see them with their beer and pipes. Filthy sawdust on the floor. I should be beaten, says Mr. Pig—beaten till I have sense—huh! Such as his, eh?"

"No more to-night." Trimble sighed impatiently. "It is always that way. The thought of her husband disturbs her equanimity. Annette, listen to me," he said, sharply. "You were about to say—"

"I could box his ears, that Pierre!" Annette fumed. "The other girl of France was the one, after all, because not a dreamy fool as I am."

Trimble got up. "Go to bed now, Annette," he advised, gently. "We'll come again soon. Good night."

They left her struggling to her feet and muttering something in drowsy anger. Outside the two men walked along in silence for a while. Presently Trimble said:

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"I think we dipped into real facts to-night, Gramling."

"I begin to think so myself," was the answer the other gave. "The whole thing is becoming clearer. I've long suspected a plot of some sort, and it was almost unfolded to-night."

"We must get more out of Annette," said the professor. "I'll keep in touch with her and let you hear from me. By the way"—he took from his pocket a folded manuscript—"here is the thing I wanted you to read. It seems to have no bearing on our case. It is merely a piece of fiction which Annette said she was 'told' to produce. Read it at your leisure. I'm no judge of literary production, but it is so wonderfully worded, and is so smooth and musical in style, that I want your opinion of it. I have searched for a blemish, but could not find one."

CHAPTER XXIV

GRAMLING did not read the manuscript till the next morning after he had reached Oaklawn. In fact, it escaped his memory, and he might not have thought of it so soon if he had not run across it in his pocket among some other papers to which he had to refer in the library work. He was at his table reading it when Lucia passed with some books in her hands. For once he did not look at her, so tense was his interest in the strange flight of fancy embodied in the quaint writing. He told himself that it was a prose poem of the greatest excellence, and how it could have come from the source it did he could not imagine. After finishing its perusal he sat with his eyes on the floor, his whole being athrob with exquisite emotions the story had stirred.

"Why, what is the matter?" Lucia inquired, playfully, as she paused in front of him. "I've never seen you so absorbed before. I spoke to you twice, but was unable to make you hear."

"Pardon me," he cried, regretfully. "I was reading a little thing which Trimble handed me. It is a bit of fiction, but it is wonderful. It is about music. In fact, it seems to be the very

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soul of music itself. I'd like to have you read it, if you will."

"What, during work hours? Fie, sir! I thought you were more conscientious than that."

"It is very short; it will only take a minute or so," he urged, extending it to her.

She took the typewritten sheets and smiled. "Well, I'll do it," she agreed, and she went back to her table and sat down. Stealthily he watched her countenance for the play of emotions he thought would be there. He saw her fix her eyes on the opening page, and then start, flush crimson, and flash a queer glance at him, only to draw it away and continue reading. She twirled the pages rapidly, seeming to take in only a paragraph of each until the end was reached. Then, rising, she went to a window and, with the folded manuscript clutched in her hands, she stood looking out, her back to Gramling. He was astounded, for he was sure that she was angry, and he had never seen her so before.

He called out to her, but, while she shrugged visibly, she did not turn or speak, and she seemed to draw herself up haughtily.

Fairly alarmed, he went to her. Her face was flushed, her eyes flashing as if from resentment.

"Lucia," he said, "what is the matter?"

This time she not only shrugged her shoulders, but she sneered, tossed her head, and gave him her eyes in a cold, indignant stare.

"If you intend this for a practical joke, Mr.

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Stirling," she said, her lips tight, "it is a poor one, and quite offensive to me. I have no idea how you came into possession of this, but I am sure you realize that you had no right to read it and call my attention to it as you have. I resent it, sir."

"Lucia, for God's sake, don't be hasty!" he implored her. "I give you my word that I can't see why you are offended. Trimble handed it to me last night to read, and—"

"Then *he* took it!" burst from her lips. "You said he was a gentleman, but he is a spy, nosing about trying to find out something about me."

"Took it? What do you mean, Lucia? Trimble is the soul of honor. Took it from where?"

"From my room—not this, but the original of which this is a copy. I was reading it only the other day. I wrote it years ago in Italy—"

"You—you wrote it?" Gramling broke in, incredulously. "Why, Lucia, there must be some mistake. Trimble—"

"Wait. I'll see if it is gone," the girl cried. "I know where I left it." And whirling from him, still incensed, she hurried from the room. He followed her to the foot of the stairs and, bewildered by what had happened, stood waiting for her return. Presently he heard her step above and saw her, with some dainty blue sheets of paper in her hand, begin to slowly descend.

"I've found it," she said, a helpless and still resentful look in her eyes; "but how you or

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Professor Trimble could have copied it I don't know. I've always locked my room, and this—this was among some of my most sacred mementoes. I never intended it to be read by anyone. My brother loved it, and helped me put it into shape. I can't forgive the person that did this."

She strode on past him, erect and haughty, till she was seated at her table, the blue sheets folded under her elbow. He followed contritely and stood at her side.

"Listen, Lucia," he began. "There is a terrible mystery about this, and I think that I begin to see through it."

Bending over her regal head, he told her about his visits to Annette with Trimble, and the remarkable psychic powers the woman possessed. At first Lucia only sat coldly, but as he continued his explanation and finally mentioned the manuscript and how it had come to Trimble, she became interested. She looked up, her eyes full of vague curiosity.

"Do you believe that she could do anything as remarkable as to reproduce a story she has never seen?"

"She seems to have done other things quite as phenomenal," Gramling declared. "Trimble thinks she is a psychic marvel."

Lucia turned and smiled. "I was wrong," she faltered. "I was too hasty, and I hope you will forgive me."

"You had every right to be offended," Gramling

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said, "viewing the matter from your standpoint. But I must congratulate you, Lucia; that story is the most exquisite bit of literature I ever read. Its effect on me is indescribable."

Lucia seemed not to hear. She moved back to her table and sat down, the two manuscripts before her. Suddenly she looked straight at him and said:

"I'd like to see that woman. I've always believed that there ought to be mediums like that. I experience transcendental things, but I can't tell them. Yes, I'd like to see her. Do you suppose I might?"

He hesitated. He had not counted on the request.

"I can't say, Lucia," he stammered. "Trimble says she sees few persons, and—"

"I think I shall ask him." Lucia seemed to be speaking as much to herself as to her companion. "Oh, she must be wonderful. Poor woman—and so badly understood by others! I sympathize with her. She and I could be friends."

"Yes, you might ask Trimble," Gramling said. "I'm sure he would be delighted to favor you if he possibly can."

"No, no! I forgot!" Lucia suddenly exclaimed.

"Forgot what, Lucia?"

"I forgot that I am a prisoner here. I could not go out safely." She seemed to be saddened by the thought, for her face fell and a disconsolate shadow brooded over her eyes. "No, I'll not ask him, after

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all—it doesn't matter. Besides, what could she tell me that I do not already know?"

"Perhaps, Lucia—" Gramling sat down near her. "Does it occur to you that perhaps Annette might be able to give you some helpful advice about—about how to get out of your present unjust difficulties?"

Lucia stared, sighed, and slowly shook her head. "I don't think so," she said. "I believe there are evil powers which even the good forces cannot easily conquer. I know that, for, otherwise, I'd have been free long ago. My enemy—my chief enemy—my only enemy on earth—holds in his cramped frame all the evil in the universe."

"So there is one in particular?" Gramling ventured. "One who—"

"Let us not speak of him, please!" She shuddered darkly. "Even the memory of him and his horrible, intricate, and subtle designs against me fairly sickens me. There is no hope—this woman can't aid me—no one can. Hiding like this is my only chance, and that is only a fragile, temporary one."

She crossed the room for some books she had to have, and he felt that their talk for the time was ended.

CHAPTER XXV

THAT evening, as he and Trimble were dining together at Trimble's home, Gramling brought up the incident relating to the manuscript.

"I'm not surprised," the professor said. "It is somewhat in line with an experiment I made with her in my library. While she was sleeping I asked her if she could read a certain page in a certain volume of an encyclopedia of mine, subject and phrasing of which I myself was ignorant. She promptly answered, 'Yes.' And you may be sure that I was curious to see what would follow."

"And she did it?" Gramling asked.

"Marvelously! And the weirdest part of it was that she held out her hands exactly as if she were holding the big book in her lap. Once she made a movement like that of slowly turning a page, and I afterward found that a page had to be turned by anyone reading the article."

At this point Gramling mentioned Lucia's desire to see Annette. Trimble deliberated for a moment, then he gave out, slowly: "I hardly know what to say about it, I am sure. You see, a stranger just now might complicate matters a little, and it seems to me that we are at a critical point in the development of this particular sub-

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ject. I am hoping, you see, that Annette will resume where she left off the last night we saw her, and if Miss Lingle were there she might not so readily do so."

"We might have them meet later. Don't you think so?" Gramling asked.

"Oh yes, I think so. In fact, we might ask Annette about it when we see her next. She is to be here Friday evening, and you must come. She says she does better work here than at home. There, it seems, her mind gets on her husband and her domestic duties."

The next séance was held in Trimble's study, and when Gramling arrived, being a little late, owing to his missing a train, Annette was already asleep in a deep-cushioned, luxurious chair, while the professor waited in the library adjoining.

"She seemed rather uncomfortable sitting around with me alone, and so I put her to sleep at once. It is remarkable how timid she is, considering her volubility while entranced. She stammered and blushed all through our little dinner, and scarcely ate anything at all. Well, let's get to work."

The medium made no movement as they quietly entered the darkened room and sat down. "Well, Annette," the professor began, "here we are again. Now I hope you are in a good mood."

"Where is the grouchy doorkeeper?" Annette asked, a sound like a low growl in her throat.

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"She means my man," Trimble said, in an undertone. "She doesn't like him. She feels that he is curious to understand why she comes here like this, and, of course, I cannot explain to him. I have had him only a short time."

"I've sent him away, Annette," Trimble said aloud. "Don't think about him. He won't bother us."

"Very well—very well! Oh, this is delightful!" the medium exclaimed.

"What is it that is delightful?" Trimble asked.

"How could I tell you? I could not explain it to myself. I have it, that's all. Oh, how sweet and balmy and fragrant the air! How soothing and musical the light—if it is light! But ah, it isn't anything but—what it is! Let me go—something is holding me and pressing down on my eyelids. Now I see through them as through slits knife-made in leather, and my view is broadening, extending. Ah, now! Now! Now! Every time it is different. Do you wonder that I love to sleep, you men who never sleep?"

"What do you see and hear, Annette?" pursued the investigator, seductively.

"Oh, don't bother me—in the name of the—the One Light, the holy All Light, don't bother me!"

"But, Annette—"

"Don't bother me—you cut me with a million blades. Let me— Oh, oh, there it is again! I've never seen it before—its shadow, maybe, yes, but the thing itself, no."

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"Do you see any of our friends, Annette?"

"Yes, yes, but they, too, stand agape. All stand agape while it is passing. Oh, oh! I wonder if the tongue of me is working down there in the scullery of earth-crust learning. Is it—is it window-eyed, man?"

"Yes, yes, you are doing very well, Annette." Trimble was too earnest even to smile over the personal allusion. "Go on, go on, if you can. You say you see our two friends."

"Yes, but I cannot disturb them. They stand amazed in the flood of It. They grovel in the scum with you at times, but not during the—the Passing. They are tried sorely, for it is the law to follow It, as a dungeon plant that bends its succulent neck toward far-off light. Now It is thinning . . . a little . . . a little. It is gone."

"And you can now reach our friends?" Trimble said.

"Yes, for they want me. It is chimney-sweep work for them now, but they are grim and resigned. Yes, yes, you two. Here I am. You are blinded still, and so am I."

There was a dead silence for several minutes. Then Annette was heard saying: "Professor—Professor, quick! The pictures are coming—the pictures they transmit. No words—all pictures, but meaning ones."

"Go ahead, Annette; I'm all attention."

There was an unexpected pause. Then from the sleeper:

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"Pierre the beast! He is dressing up to go out. He looks in the glass, pomades his sweaty hair. Stands smirking. It is the new one. She the girl who tempts divorce. Ah! why do I care?"

"You mustn't think of him to-night, Annette." Trimble all but groveled in his appeal. "Turn your back on him."

"I know—I know it is a sin of me. There, pull me up—you Ashley one, and send the pictures in. Ah yes, I see and will make it talk. It runs glibly to-night. Yes, I see. The great steam water bird. The deck. The lovely one alone—always alone in her chair with rugs of Italian sheep's wool. The book never read. The walkers-by never seen, but gazing they always at beauty never so beheld before. Now America. Then—the city of a million lived-in cubbyholes. Hole upon hole, like the honey's thin comb. The landing. The swarm of senseless men in reeking streets. The smell of garbage. A cab. A hotel. The room. The untouched meal on a tray. No sleep. The train at dawn. The long journey as behind black-plumed horses to—to (days and nights)—to, yes, a city. A picture—a picture—Ashley one give me a picture! Ah, the earthquake and the flames. He'll understand, you say? Yes, perhaps."

"San Francisco!" chimed in Trimble.

"They smile—you are right. The beautiful one again, but how terrible! The fiend meets her. She withers under a kiss—a Judas kiss.

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Who gave me that? I swear I beheld that far-off scene and not from memory of the book print. Professor, no living one knows the truth as picture—given me. The light of this Judas blazes here. How can I give it to you as it flows to me? He was chosen as the One was chosen, and both bled from soul alike. They know each other now. No one steps aside from holy law—nor did Judas in that shifting scene. But they push me on—the Ashley one and the Morten.”

“The beautiful one,” Trimble hinted, softly. “What of her?”

“Ah, the designing fiend! He takes her to—to—yes, I see it, Ashley one, with your eyes, faithful boy—a country home, but lonely. No one there but the paid and the bribed underlings. I’m given to see her—in the room she sleeps in, in the *salon*, too, on the grounds—alone, always alone. The grief still with. Italy-hunger and the need of the—the missing one. She breaks. She falls. The fiend from the city bank at her bed. And no doctor called! He sits gloating—the fiend! The money beheld in mind. They hurry me, the pictures so fast and many. He hopes death to her. Impatient he. Not even sleep, so excited. Death, and all will be his—lands, bonds, houses, money already in his charge as guardian by the judge’s smile that day. But death pities one so sad and beautiful. She lives. The fiend broods. He is now—I see him, yes, Ashley one—I see him reading the book for slow poison. No

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one to know, but afraid he, and why? I know—the picture gives it. The spirit brother, the dear Ashley one—holds him by the neck of fear. The price is so big all will suspect, and the fiend doubts the poise of his eye under the eyes of twelve if made to stand. And the hand on neck of fear gives him to shudder and to quake. No—the poison—no. Some other way. Accident, maybe, but how? No plan at desk in bank, or sleepless bed, or lonely walks in great grounds, a thousand devils with—devils with—with—with—”

Silence, heavy breathing; Annette's fingers were squirming in her lap, as if she were about to wake.

“Not yet—not yet, Annette,” Trimble commanded, with the sharpness of tense interest. “Sleep, sleep—you are drowsy; your eyes are heavy. Dreams are coming, sweet dreams! Now, now, you are asleep!”

“No, awake, monsieur—this is the wake; that you have is the sleep.”

“You saw devils with the fiend,” Trimble suggested. “Well, what then?”

“Why, the music-picture. She plays in the piano room in the mansion of the fiend. No light and midnight. She in robe of black lost against cloud of night. The fiend in his chamber. Hearing, wonders—downstairs groping as thief in blackness. Music entrancing, but sees no one. Peers into room of music. No one seen, but sound seductive still. Marvels he, the fiend—afraid of vibration's charm. The music ends.

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The black-robed witch of the keys moves forward. She sees, in light he makes, but knows him not as ever having met before.

"He questions. She answers as a dreamer. The things she saw and still sees she relates as if the mouthpiece of the Eternal One. He thrills—throbs, rubs hands of joy. A way opens. He calls servants to note the talk and swear before the twelve and judge. She is insane—is that your word, window-eyes? Not mine, but obtained somewhere."

"Ah, I comprehend, Annette." Trimble nudged Gramling significantly. "Go on. What next?"

"Women with the hands of scrubbing lead her to bed still adream, she in black. They give me to see the courthouse. Witnesses of the night scene solemn swear on a Book a thousand crime kisses beslimed. Well paid, more they swear than the night scene gave. Dangerous she with plot to kill. The judge, a serf to wealth and in debt to bank, listens, half asleep. He gravely nods to the twelve. They with the slit eyes of apes so wise see naught, think naught but their call to shop and farm. The great wealth of field, too, awes to silence."

"But she—the beautiful one, Annette—" Trimble started to say.

"She sits there, Professor. I saw, and thought you saw. They call her to the solitary seat. O Eternal One, she tells too much—the highest truth, yes, but truth to *her*—not truth to brains

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of mud. Fiend aglow. Yes, she thought to kill herself many times, she tells the judge, but was stopped by the brother said to be dead, but there then holding her hand. She tells it calm as voice of settling dew. Hated the fiend? Yes, she said it, though she confesses that she knew of no unkind act of his. Fiend flushed by flow from lowest hell. Veins of neck packed by blood of joy, the muscles drawn. Expert man of empty mind study paid to talk. It is over—the court picture slid aside as enough of that. The vast white house in the country with walls of grounds spiked high. The black-robed one dressed like the rest so numerous, and so blank of face and eyes. Attendants supplied by fiend, paid, instructed by constant talks and visits. Confined. Many lies told, and—and—and—”

Annette's voice trailed away. She was heard to sob.

“What is it now, Annette?” Trimble asked.

Another sob, then, huskily: “Poor girl—that the earth road should be so rough! She knows she is wronged, but helpless she, in grasp of fiends seen and unseen. But light of joy! Light of hope! The Ashley one leads to escape—the secret his. She flees—at night, disguised. She escapes. A long walk through trees. Hiding in rain and wind. Hungry. Thirsting. A friendly farm woman. A horse. A wagon. Then a train and away. The bank. The fiend at desk, I see him. The telegram—I see it, too. Letters as

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black as webs of hell. He staggers with dismay, he. No madness in flight so shrewd. Business in bank over now. Detectives many and the best—the high reward the country over.”

“And finally New York,” prompted Trimble, to expedite the recital.

“Yes, and pain, and hunger, and despair. Protected she by the Morten one who is endowed to reach. A friend, the bearded one—much Morten-loved. Danger grave and close again. Storm-thwarted guard in street. Escape—disguised as man. Away, away again to the great house.”

“And is she safe now, Annette?” Trimble wanted to know.

“Safe—safe? The pictures slide. Yes . . . no . . . maybe. Ah, the fiend himself is in New York now! Hotel like a prince. Advised to come. In case of capture must be here to have papers ready for the return to—to the spiked walls.”

“I understand so far, Annette,” Trimble said. “But what are we advised to do to help the lady?”

“Wait—ah, they know not, even they with eyes of supernal sight. Too many like you, window-eyes, believe the bodiless know more than you. Ah, they do about their own new realm, but the puzzle of this is forgotten as you the baby life have lost.”

“I understand,” answered the professor, “but is she safer where she now is?”

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"Wait. It's dark. They are trying to stay near me—the friends. But the tide sweeps and draws."

"So you can't answer that, Annette?"

"Not I, and they are gone with the singers and the wavers of the flags of bliss. They try to aid, but can only when they fight back into the pit of man. Heroes, these two, for they renounce the Light for love that dwells in flesh and bone. I'd free their pinions, I— But no, not when I see the beautiful one who glows as one released before his hour."

"See her—so you see her at times, Annette?"

"Of course. We meet in dreams, two women souls who understand when dreaming. Why did you tell the bearded one at dinner that—that—"

Annette moaned softly as if half awake, and paused.

"Tell him what, Annette?" the professor asked, in surprise.

"That it might not be wise for her to see me. Investigations would stop, said you. Not at all. She might aid—wonderfully aid."

"Ah, a good idea!" Trimble exclaimed. "But at what place would you meet her, Annette? Here at my house or at yours?"

"Risk here—risk with me. The library house—ah, she herself sends it to me on the waves of mind, for, weary, she sleeps in the room Morten haunts. Yes, the great house. I'm riding there in the car of yours, Professor, and at night."

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“Good!” Trimble said. “We’ll arrange it with the lady and let you know, Annette.”

“Vare well—vare well.” Annette was coming to herself. She leaned forward, rubbed her brow with both her hands, and groaned. “It is awful, zis back return to ze misery. Zat Pierre, ze pig of a man. I haven’t told you, monsieur, but he no return. I zink he quit me—well, well, I no care mooch. My fault—his fault? I don’t know. De uzzer woman—well, let her have heem. Zey two pigs alike. Ugh! me done wiz Pierre.”

Annette was fully awake now.

“So you really think he will remain away?” the professor inquired.

“Oh yes”—she shrugged—“but I have some money in ze bank—enough; and I am free. Let zem go. Me no hate ze woman, no. I live my dream time and wait ze change. Ah, zat can’t come me too soon!”

CHAPTER XXVI

THAT night before retiring Gramling sat for half an hour in the recreation park, for the air was sultry and the thought of the small room uninviting. It was eleven o'clock when he went in.

To his surprise, he found Mrs. Carr waiting for him in her room, the door of which was open.

"I want to see you, Mr. Stirling," she said. "I was afraid I'd miss you. There is something I want to speak about in confidence. A very queer thing has happened to me and I don't know what to make of it. This morning in the mail I found an envelope addressed to me. It was rather bulky, and when I opened it I found that it contained five one-hundred-dollar bills and a slip of paper on which was written these words: 'From a grateful friend in recognition of many kind acts.'"

Gramling started, stared unsteadily at the woman's animated face, and then rather awkwardly looked about for a chair, which he found and sat in.

"That—that's queer, certainly is queer," he said, haltingly, and slightly flushed. "And have you any idea who sent it?"

"I've been puzzling my brain all day about it"—Mrs. Carr smiled—"but I've given it up as a

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bad job. I don't know a soul who could afford to throw money away like that. My friends are all as poor as I am."

"It certainly is odd," Gramling repeated, his eyes averted, his hands unsteady on his knees. "I suppose the—the bills are genuine?"

"Oh yes, I took them to the savings bank and told Mr. Hughes about it. He examined them and said they were all right and put the amount to my credit. There is only one loophole that I see as to who did it. I used to have with me a wild, reckless young man from the West—a Mr. Fred Duncan. He was always gambling and playing the races. One day he'd have a roll and the next he'd be strapped. He was taken sick on my hands once and I fed and nursed him. He went off a year ago and said he would write me, but he never did. Almost the last thing Fred said was that if he ever struck it big he would remember me, and it seems to me that maybe he has won out in some venture."

"That's the man." Gramling looked straight at her. "You may rely on it, Mrs. Carr. It is exactly the sort of thing a man of that type would do, and anonymously, too."

"It may be, but the odd thing about it is that it was posted here in New York," Mrs. Carr answered, thoughtfully. "And I can't understand why, if Fred is in the city, he does not come around. He used to be very fond of me."

Gramling again averted his eyes and got up to

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go. "It is odd all around," he said. "You may get to the bottom of it some day. Perhaps he got a friend to post it here to keep from revealing his present address."

"Maybe." Mrs. Carr smiled unctuously. "Well, I'm happy over it. I needed the money. I have a big debt to pay next month, and this will be a great help. I wish you'd tell Miss Lingle about it when you see her. She'd like to know of my good luck. She is so sweet and sympathetic."

Three days later, as Gramling was leaving the train at the Spring Street station, at six o'clock on his way to his room, he saw Mrs. Carr rise from one of the benches and hurry toward him.

She was pale and agitated. "Quick!" she said under her breath. "Let's catch that train. I must see you—but not here. Quick!"

Nonplused, he followed her back into the car he had just left. It was crowded and there were no vacant seats. They stood side by side, packed in by other standing passengers.

"The Bridge," she whispered. "We'll get out there." And she bent her head to peer through a window. "Thank God!" he heard her say. Then to him: "Can't talk here. Wait till we reach the Bridge."

He nodded wonderingly. At the next station some of the passengers left, and he found a seat for her, which she took. He stood, now and then glancing at her enigmatical face, which was still grave and held a look of suppressed excitement.

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Finally the Bridge was reached and they got out. And as they made their way toward the stairs he saw her furtively scanning the tide of passengers leaving the train. Even when they were out in the open she said nothing immediately. But, it being dark, she caught his arm and led him toward the City Hall Park, near by.

"This will do," she muttered. "Thank God! I think we gave them the slip."

"Whom do you mean?" he asked.

She made no answer till they were at a somewhat retired seat in the park, and then she sank into it, making room for him beside her. She now began almost to whimper under a touch of mild hysteria. "I was afraid I'd miss you at the station," she faltered. "Everything depended on getting there in time. Something has happened, Mr. Stirling, which it was necessary for you to know to keep you from coming home to-night. I don't think it would be best."

"You say something has—" he began, but she broke in:

"Yes, listen and judge for yourself. This morning while I was doing my housework the front-door bell rang. I went and unlocked it. It was two of the men who came looking for Miss Lingle that day. They acted very rude, even rough. They pushed their way in and began to threaten me. I don't think many criminals are grilled worse than I was for more than an hour. They said I knew where Miss Lingle was, and,

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when I denied it, they said I was lying out and out. After a while they gave it up, or pretended to—it all may be a part of their game, you know—and one of them took another tack. He smirked and fawned and begged my pardon and said that he was sure that I did not understand the seriousness of the matter. Then he went on to tell me that Miss Lingle was insane and had escaped from a madhouse. When I told him that was ridiculous, he said that her case was the rarest one known, that she had a way of worming herself in with strangers, but that she was a most dangerous woman and ought not to be at large. Oh, the things he didn't tell me! She was planning murder in her own family for some fancied offense and was likely to harm anyone she took a dislike to. They showed me their documents—orders for her arrest from the authorities in San Francisco, and then they went on to say that Miss Lingle's family were influential people who were anxious to have her cared for properly and cured if possible. Her real name is Dunton, they said, Lucia Dunton, and that may be true, for I remember seeing that name on some of her linen that I did up for her once when she was not well. She has a half brother, according to them, who is a wealthy banker and willing to pay well for her capture. Then the detectives began another tack. The main talker drew out an enormous roll of bills and counted out a thousand dollars and offered them to me.

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“‘Quit your foolishness,’ he laughed. ‘Take this and tell me where that crazy girl is. There is more where this came from and I’ll see that you get a couple of thousand more as soon as she’s safe in our hands.’

“Of course I refused the money, and my doing so must have convinced him that I really didn’t know where she is, for he seemed awfully disappointed, and the two of them stood looking queer at each other.

“‘She’s giving it to you straight,’ the man who had not talked so much said. ‘She doesn’t know where the girl is. Our bird is too slick to let anyone know where she was bound for.’

“They went outside. From my window I saw them in the park on a bench. They sat there for about half an hour, then they got up and came to me again. They began by apologizing and tried to act very friendly. They had their business to attend to and I had mine, they said, and I ought not to blame them for doing all they could to hold their jobs. I wondered what was coming, for I felt that they had something up their sleeve, but you may be sure that I was astonished when they described you—said they had seen you coming out of my house and wanted to know if you were in.

“I told them you were not at home and that I didn’t know when you’d return. They looked at each other in an odd sort of way and then asked me what line of work you did.

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"I told them I didn't know, as you'd only been with me a short while, and then they wanted to see your room. I refused to let them and they got mad and rough again. They showed their badges, and one of them went to the door and whistled. I hadn't seen him before, but I then saw a policeman come from behind the hedge in the park and cross over.

"He was very gruff. Told me to stand aside and let those men search the room. I had to give in. I was sure you had nothing to hide and felt that I might be throwing suspicion on you by objecting, so I showed all three of them upstairs, and they went in and tumbled your room up. I was in Miss Lingle's old room and heard them swearing and throwing your things about.

"'He knows where the girl is all right,' I heard one of them say, 'for they were seen together in the park and at restaurants, and were very chummy.' They finally gave it up, growled a good deal, and left the house."

"So they did go." Gramling breathed more freely.

"They did and they didn't, Mr. Stirling, and that's where the trouble is—and that is why I came to meet you at the station. You see, I wasn't satisfied with the way they looked and acted, and so I hid behind the curtains of my window and watched. They all three went to the park again and sat on a bench. That was eleven o'clock this morning, Mr. Stirling, and

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when I left home about five they were still watching the house, though distributed about—the policeman in front and the other two a little way up and down the street.”

“And you came to warn me—to tell me that—”

“That you ought not to come home to-night in any case, and perhaps not again soon. I am sure they intend to arrest you. I presume they could do it under the charge that you are aiding Miss Lingle to escape.”

“Yes, no doubt,” Gramling said, “and I must not go back to your house. You’ve done both me and Miss Lingle a great service. They may not intend to arrest me, but only to keep me under watch. But even in that case I must avoid them, for they would doubtless follow me, and she and I work at the same place, you know.”

“Do you need any money?” the woman asked. “You know I am ‘flush,’ as Fred used to say when he’d win, and I’d like to advance—”

“Oh, I have a plenty,” he answered. “I’ll keep in touch with you. I have a friend who may call for my things—a Professor Trimble.” Here Gramling described Trimble and assured Mrs. Carr that he was entirely trustworthy.

She stood up to go. “Well, I’m glad that I got to you in time,” she said, with a little laugh of satisfaction. “I’m sure they are still on guard in front of my house, and the longer they wait the madder they will get.”

CHAPTER XXVII

GRAMLING sat on the bench and watched her make her way across the asphalt pavement to the Subway entrance. It was now eight o'clock. He had not decided what course he should pursue. He must sleep somewhere, and without luggage of some sort he would be looked on as a suspicious character at a hotel or rooming house. He went to a café on Broadway and ate his supper, still undecided, and then he suddenly bethought himself of Oaklawn. Why not go there? Lucia was practical and sensible and would readily understand the situation. The idea entranced him. To live in such constant touch with her would be a delight; besides, she was lonely in the great house and needed his protection. He hastened now. For he wanted to see her, if possible, before she retired, and tell her the news.

It was ten o'clock, however, when he got to Oaklawn. He was disappointed in not seeing any light about the vast structure. Lucia had retired, and he told himself that he must be very careful to make no sound in entering, for that might frighten her. As stealthily as a burglar he unlocked the door, entered, and quite as stealthily closed and locked the door. The heavy carpeting

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muffled his tread and, turning on the light in the hall, he made his way into the main *salon* and thence to the library. Should he go up to his old room? He decided against it, fearing that the ascent of the stairs might alarm Lucia, who, after all, might be awake. He would sleep on the couch in the library, and surprise her in the morning. He had seated himself on the couch and was about to remove his outer clothing when he heard a low footstep at the head of the stairs, and he tiptoed into the hall and stood, holding his breath.

"Is that you, Miss Lingle?" he asked, in a low voice.

There was a pause, and then came the startled demand, in excited tones, "Who is that?"

"I—Gramling!" slipped unconsciously from his lips, and then, bewildered by his mistake, he stood, unable to proceed.

"Oh, Mr. Gramling!" came down from Lucia. "I thought—we thought—Professor Trimble said you were abroad, and—"

"It is I—Stirling, Lucia," Gramling stammered out. "I didn't know what I was saying—you, you asked me so suddenly. I—I happened to be thinking of the owner's name. May I see you to-night? I have news. I had to come right out."

"You? How queer! Wait, I'll be right down. Oh, how you frightened me! I thought it was someone—" Her voice died away as she went back into her room. Presently, dressed in the most

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becoming kimono he had ever seen her wear, she came down and joined him in the *salon*.

"Oh, how you frightened me!" she said. "I was not asleep. I heard you open the gate, cross the porch, and open the door. I saw the light flash up as I stood in the dark in the corridor. Oh, what has happened?"

"There is no danger," he said at the start, to put her at ease, and then he recounted what had happened, omitting, however, the detective's statement that she was said to be insane. She listened wide eyed, her lips parted in suspense, her breast rising and falling under its light covering.

"So they know that we knew each other," she said. "I wonder how they discovered it. Ah, I understand. They were watching me earlier than I thought. I wonder if they know of this place."

"No, otherwise they would have been here already," Gramling answered. "They are waiting for me now at Mrs. Carr's. They have evidently not followed me out here. I really think we are safe here, Lucia. I shall not go in again, and they will never dream of our being in an out-of-the-way place like this."

"Somehow I feel safe here"—she half smiled—"and I'm glad you've come. You have as much right here as I, and that little room of yours was not at all comfortable. I'm sure Professor Trimble wants us both here."

"Oh yes, that is all right," Gramling said. "It

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is hot in town, and the long rides in and out such weather as this are not the most delightful thing in the world. I'll be up early and cook the breakfast."

"No, I will do it," she protested. "I love that sort of thing. Which room shall you take?"

"Gramling's," he said, with a touch of hesitation. "I may as well appropriate his room. I used his name just now. Did you notice that, Lucia?"

"Yes, and it took my breath away—so much so that I failed to recognize your voice. I wondered what I'd do and say to a stranger like that at this time of night, for, of course, some explanation would have been necessary, and Professor Trimble may not have mentioned my living here."

Gramling was flurried still. "I don't know how I happened to say it," he went on. "I was thinking of him, I remember, and when you called out so suddenly I was startled."

"It was strange, but many things are strange of late," Lucia mused aloud. "I often think I feel the presence of Morten Gramling, and he seems to put words into my mouth. Perhaps he made you speak as you did."

"Perhaps. Yes, that may be," Gramling said, relieved. "I don't want to think that I am getting in my dotage before my time."

A week passed. Trimble at Gramling's request went to Mrs. Carr's, brought away the few things

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he had left in his room, and the report that the detectives were still searching in the neighborhood for a man by the name of Stirling. They had called twice, offered money again, and finally gave up trying to gain Mrs. Carr's aid.

"I think you are absolutely safe here," Trimble said to his friend, "provided that they do not see you in town and follow you here. I'd stay away if I were you. When are you going to tell this charming girl who you are?"

"Oh, not now—not now!" Gramling said, in no little confusion. "It would raise an awkward situation between her and me. She thinks she is earning her living now, and to learn the truth would upset everything."

"Well, you know best," the professor said. "She is anxious to see Annette, and I am to bring her here to-morrow night about eight. You'll be here, of course."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THAT day, as he and Lucia sat at luncheon, Gramling said: "I'm very, very sorry for you, Lucia. This is such a lonely existence for you."

She shrugged, and her face saddened. "Yes, for a long time I've been lonely. There is one particular thing that I miss."

"May I ask what it is?" he questioned, softly.

"You'll smile," she responded, with a little wry smile of her own, "but I miss children. I always loved them, but since my troubles began I have not been able to get in touch with them. You see, I've had to be a stranger to parents, and that naturally kept their children from me. Oh, children are lovely!"

"You feel so because you are a natural woman—normal in every way," said Gramling.

"And not insane?" She laughed significantly. "I've heard that insane parents never love their own children."

"Lucia," he said, firmly, "there is the obsession again, and you promised—"

"But," she broke in, gravely, "you must know—you ought to be told that a jury has found—"

"I know that, too," he said, quickly, "but I

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haven't given it a second thought. The detectives told Mrs. Carr, and she doesn't believe it, either. Professor Trimble knows of the charge, too, and he, one of the greatest mind experts in the world, says it is absurd."

"Oh, I'm so glad—so glad that you all know and still believe in me!" Lucia exclaimed.

"Not only that," Gramling affirmed, warmly, "but Trimble and I are going to take your part in this thing, and secure your liberty. It is best for you to remain in hiding for a while till we see our way more clearly, but you will not go back to confinement. You may rely on that."

Lucia slowly and gravely shook her head. "You can't imagine the long and intricate case they have built up against me." She sighed. "It would take me an hour to tell you. No brain but a satanic one could have devised it, and its plausible knots and threads of detail—things sworn to that happened when I was a child—the poems and sketches I wrote put in evidence; the entries in a diary I used to keep; the things I said of my visions while playing the piano. All those were facts, you see, which made the terrible, cold-blooded lies as to my murderous intentions seem true. As I faced that callous jury that day I lost all hope of ever getting legal justice. And when I found that my keepers were paid to lie as to my daily acts and threats, I knew my only hope lay in escape. I did manage to get away, but if I were caught my captors would only take

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back fresh perjuries as to what happened during my flight, and I'd be incarcerated again and more carefully guarded and cruelly treated. As for my life"—she snapped her fingers—"it wouldn't be worth that. I know that I'd be put to death by some slow method, for my half brother's prize would then be won. Do you understand now, Mr. Stirling?"

Gramling nodded, deeply moved. Taking her hand, he pressed it tenderly.

"You'll never go through all that again, Lucia," he said. "I swear it. Trimble and I will move heaven and earth to prevent it. You are safe here in this house—absolutely. There is an underground secret chamber below. It was built by Gramling's father when the house was made, for the storage of valuables against fire and robbery. Come with me and I'll show you where it is."

"Really? Really?" Lucia cried, incredulous, and rising.

"Yes, come on." He piloted her to the floor of the basement, past the wine cellar and furnace room, along a corridor to its end near the front of the building.

"Is it beneath this?" Lucia inquired.

"Yes. The stairway is under the flooring of the room on the right. The door is most wonderfully concealed and could not be discovered by the most careful search. Will you come see it?"

Lucia shuddered. "No, not now, but what was your idea?"

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"Why," Gramling answered, as they began to retrace their steps, "in case the detectives did suspect your being here, I'd simply stow you away for a little while and let them search the house to their hearts' content, and after that they would, perhaps, renounce the idea that you are here."

She made no answer, and he was touched by the sensitive look about her eyes. "I am a great deal of trouble to you," she faltered. "I'm sorry that I am such a burden."

"Lucia, don't!" he cried, passionately.

"But I am," she insisted. "We met by chance—perfect strangers—and yet already I am seriously involving you and your friend. I'm wise enough in the ways of the world to know that in hiding me this way you are breaking the law and rendering yourself liable to punishment. I know the great power that is against me. Mr. Stirling, I ought not to have allowed our—friendship to go so far as this."

"Stop, please stop, Lucia!" he pleaded. "They were now in the upper library. "What you are saying is very painful. I'll never rest till you are out of trouble. You know what you have become to me. You must know. You can see."

She sank into the chair at her desk, rested her brow on the tips of her slender fingers, and sighed. "Yes, I know. I am sure you care for me very deeply, and—and—" She broke off, and then finished, with her frank eyes on his face: "And that is the hard part of it. No doubt you were

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happy and carefree till we met, but now, through me, you are absolutely in hiding yourself."

He laughed assuringly. "But such a hiding, Lucia!" he said. "It is heaven. In spite of your slight danger of being taken I have never been so happy in my life. You see, I feel that this situation can't last long and happiness must be ahead of us. It must—it must, dear."

She made no response, and as she was starting to work he reluctantly left her, to perform his own. Presently, happening to glance at her across the great room, he saw her staring at him fixedly as if some perplexing thought had come to her.

"What is it, Lucia?" he asked, going to her side.

"Why," she said, "I was thinking about that secret chamber. If it really *is* a secret, how could you have known about it?"

"I? Oh!" He was bewildered by her sudden demand on his powers of invention. "You see—you see Trimble happened to mention it to me. In fact, he showed me the door and taught me how to open it."

"But how could he know about it if it really was a family secret?"

"Oh, I see what you mean." Gramling managed to steady his eye and voice. "It is like this. Old Gramling made a secret of it during his life, but after his death his sons spoke of it occasionally to some of their most intimate friends, and, as I've told you, Trimble was closely connected with the family."

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Lucia seemed satisfied. "And you think that the detectives could not know about it?"

"I am sure they couldn't." Gramling breathed more freely. "However, we are crossing bridges before we get to them. I am sure your pursuers will never look for you here."

"Nothing would surprise me—nothing in regard to those men," Lucia declared. "They have ways of finding out everything. They are on your track now, and there is no telling what they may accomplish."

"You are getting blue again," Gramling said, lightly. "I am concerned about you, Lucia. Your confinement in this house is telling on you. You need outdoor air and exercise. There is an extensive wooded tract on this estate, reaching from a point near the house all the way to the river. Parts of it are as dense as an African jungle. I've seen it. It is cool and delightful. Let's take a day off to-morrow and picnic in the shadiest spot."

"Oh, it would be lovely!" she cried, but immediately shook her head. "The risk would be too great," she said. "The first thing those men would do after tracing me here would be to watch the outside. No, it wouldn't do. I'm safer inside, with the secret chamber to run to. Will you show me how to open the door sometime? You know you might happen not to be here, and I would like to be on the safe side. Will you show me?"

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"Yes, it works easy. Will you come now?"

"No, later." She went to work again, leaving him no choice but that of returning to his own task.

Later that day, after they had had tea together, he took her downstairs and showed her the secret entrance. It was a unique contrivance. On the wall of the room of which he had already spoken were a number of hooks such as are seen in the back of wardrobes.

"It works like a combination," he explained. "Let me see if I remember rightly. Yes, you turn the first on the left, then the last on the right, then the third and the fifth till this panel moves inward. Watch me."

Deftly he turned the hooks in the required manner, and a panel about the height and width of a small doorway moved inward on hinges which had become rusty and creaked. There was an electric-light button just inside, and he touched it, filling the narrow stairway and the room below with a soft pink glow.

"Do you want to go down?" he asked.

"Oh yes, yes!" Lucia cried. "It looks like a curious place."

He went ahead of her to the large chamber at the foot of the stairs. The stairway was heavily carpeted and the floor of the room. There was a table with a droplight on it, two comfortable couches with great, soft pillows, several easy-chairs, and a bookcase filled with volumes in costly bindings.

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“Why, it is furnished!” Lucia exclaimed, “and delightfully. I thought it was only for the storage of valuables.”

“There are the vaults in the alcove,” Gramling answered. “There is another light for that. I think—yes, I remember Trimble said that the—the younger Gramling, Morten Gramling, had the room fitted up. He was an odd individual, you know, a sort of mystic; he believed in meditation in silence, and I am told that he came here and stayed for hours at a time. Those are his books in the case. He read and wrote at that table.”

“Oh, how wonderful!” Lucia cried. She sat down on one of the couches, a hand on either side of her, her eyes shining in the pink glow of the lights overhead. “I could love this. It seems like—like a grave of roses. Mr. Stirling, I could die in a place like this as easily as dreaming.”

“Don’t speak of death,” he pleaded, softly, as he stood near her. “You are going to live a long time, Lucia. And you are to have all the joys you have missed so far.”

She seemed not to listen. “So Morten Gramling meditated here!” she said. “It shall be a holy spot to me, and a refuge. He led us here, Mr. Stirling—I am sure of that. I can almost feel his presence filling the room, wanting to sustain me, and loving *you*. How queer that is, but it seems to me that he really loves you. Why did I say that? I don’t know, but the impression is gone. It was a fleeting impression, only an impression,

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but it seemed very real. Oh, may I come here often, do you think?"

"Yes, of course," Gramling replied. "I'm glad you like it, for if by any remote chance you should want to hide here—"

"I wouldn't mind it at all," she said, rising. "Will you write down that combination for me? It is hard to remember."

"Perhaps you'd better merely memorize it," he suggested. "That would be the safer way."

"Yes," she agreed. "I'll do that."

In the room above he instructed her in the use of the hooks till she could open the door, and then they went above. In the daylight of the main floor she shaded her eyes. "There is a garish glare here," she said. "The light below is wonderfully soothing. But was it the profound silence of the place? It was neither," she added, with sudden conviction, "it was something else, Mr. Stirling—something subliminal, something as insubstantial as dreams, and yet the highest reality. Oh, I shall love it. It shall be my Temple of Silence."

CHAPTER XXIX

ON the evening appointed Trimble brought Annette to Oaklawn in his car, finding Gramling at the front, ready to admit them. Annette looked about her with a certain show of restraint, and it was plain to Gramling that Trimble was trying to put her at ease by a constant flow of small talk.

"Nothing but a deserted old place, Annette," he said. "Where is the young lady, Stirling?"

"She is in her room. She will be down in a moment," Gramling explained. "She is very anxious to meet you, Madame DuFresne."

Annette shrugged her heavy shoulders, but had no platitude to return. She was always blunt and practical.

"You may take off your things in the *salon*, Annette," the professor said, still with forced airiness, as he led the way, carrying his hat and light overcoat.

The great room, even more than the hall, seemed to discommode the simple woman of toil. She sank on a sofa and with clumsy red hands began to remove her hat and veil. She seemed ashamed of her coarse shoes, for she drew them

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back as far as possible beneath her plain brown skirt.

At this moment Lucia came down the stairs and advanced straight to Annette, her hands outstretched.

"Oh, I'm so glad to see you!" the girl exclaimed, warmly. "I wanted to meet you very much."

Annette flushed scarlet. She pressed Lucia's hands tightly, but seemed unable to speak. Lucia sat down beside her and put her arm around the heavy waist. "Yes, yes, I wanted to see you. You and I understand many things alike, madame. Things others don't know about."

"Yes, yes, I know you, ma'mselle," Annette said. "Ah, in dreams vare often I be with you. When you are in trouble—yes, then often."

"I understand," Lucia said, sweetly. "And you have comforted me, I'm sure."

The men stepped aside, leaving the women to become acquainted.

"You know about me, too?" Lucia went on, half questioningly. "My life, here and abroad?"

"All, ma'mselle—quite it all; I think so, and I weep. I cry. I burn my inside with mad dat de devils so much you trouble."

"Thank you, thank you, madame." This and a few other words were unconsciously spoken in French, and Annette joyfully responded in her native tongue:

"Ah, how beautifully you speak my language!"

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Annette cried, warmly caressing Lucia's hand. "It is musical. I love to hear it. So zis"—looking about her—"is your prison now?"

"Yes, for a while, madame, at any rate."

"Ah, it ees too bad, ma'mselle! Something must be happened." Annette fell back into her daily mode of speech. "*Mon Dieu!* It ees wrong, but not for always, ma'mselle. It will come, the end. The workers in the light fight the plotters in de dark. Yes, de end ees good—when? I see not yet, but good, ma'mselle, vare good and joyful."

Meanwhile Gramling was posting the professor as to his revelation of the secret chamber to Lucia, and Trimble, on his part, was giving him some fresh information.

"I have located the grand villain here in New York," Trimble said.

"You mean Lucia's half brother?"

"Yes, Richard Dunton, the wealthy banker, and the fact that he is here in person just now is decidedly significant. I think the detectives have advised his coming, and I can't say that I like the looks of it."

"You think that the detectives count on making an arrest in New York?"

"It looks that way, Gramling, I'm sorry to say."

Gramling frowned gravely, bending his gaze on the face of his companion after glancing furtively across the room at Lucia. "Do you think they could possibly suspect her being in this house?"

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Trimble looked down seriously. "I have discovered that the men Dunton has employed are the keenest in America as well as the most depraved. They would sell their souls for money, and Dunton has plenty of that and much at stake. Lucia's part of the estate he controls is worth a great deal. It consists of oil and mining lands which are constantly growing in value. You have raised my hopes to-night, however."

"I? How so?"

"Why, by telling me of the secret chamber. I had entirely forgotten your mention of it. Am I right in assuming that the knowledge of it is absolutely confined to your own family?"

"Absolutely. Morten never spoke of it, nor I, except to you and Lucia."

"Then it is an enormous card in our favor. You see, if the detectives should suspect her being here they would institute a legalized search of these premises, but if you will keep the outer doors locked you will always be warned of the approach of anyone. Lucia should be prepared to go to the secret chamber at a moment's notice, and once there, with the door closed, she would be safe. If they should come I would advise you to treat them agreeably—that is, if Lucia is well out of sight beforehand."

Gramling sighed heavily. "What is to be done?" he cried. "It is killing me to be tied hand and foot like this when she is so helpless and mistreated."

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"I don't know what it will amount to"—Trimble smiled—"but I am going to meet that cold-blooded devil, Dunton, face to face and have a talk with him. As it happens I have a good entering wedge to his acquaintance. My friend, Doctor Henry Clayton, the alienist, has had some interviews with him, though not engaged on Lucia's case. Clayton had to go to Europe at the time or he would have been employed on it. When I mentioned to him that I'd like to meet this Richard Dunton he gave me a note to him. In it he does me the flattering honor of speaking most highly of my ability as an alienist, so I'm sure that Dunton will think my object is anything but the one it will be. I know the hotel he is staying at and shall drop in to see him to-morrow or next day."

"But what do you hope to accomplish by such a visit?" Gramling asked.

"I want to see the man we are dealing with. I want to get a good look at him and size him up mentally and morally. You may not realize it, my friend, but I believe that we have the assistance of psychic forces and intelligences that far surpass the shrewdness of men in the ordinary walks of life."

"You mean through Annette?"

"Yes, she has never failed me in any important issue. She it was who told me to speak to Doctor Clayton, and when I told her yesterday of my intended visit to Dunton she warmly approved of it.

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“‘Show him that you have power to read his secret soul,’ she suggested, and when I asked her how I was to do such a thing she asked me to wait and went off to her room, as she said, to think. Presently she came back and told me a few things to say to him which I need not mention now. Then she added that I was simply to rely on what would be given me to say on the spur of the moment, and not to be afraid of failure. It will be interesting, I am sure. I am eager to tackle that fellow, but I assure you that I’ll handle him discreetly.”

They now turned back to Lucia and Annette. “What do you think?” the young lady said, eagerly. “Madame DuFresne is coming to stay with me awhile. She is lonely at home without her husband, and I really need her companionship and help.”

“A splendid idea,” Trimble and Gramling said, as with one voice. “It will be good for you both.”

“Yes, ma’mself should not be alone,” Annette put in. “I know how she feel and I have no home now. Zat Pierre away West wiz zat girl. I no care. I feel better now.”

Then the talk dragged, which seemed due partly to Annette’s sensitive shyness. Trimble besought Lucia to play and Annette clapped her hands.

“Oh, I should like vare mooch!” she cried.

Lucia hesitated. “I don’t know if I can,” she said, simply. “My moods are unreliable. When

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I don't feel like it and force myself my fingers are wooden and a painful nervousness clutches my whole body."

"Oh, I understand—I understand, ma'mselle!" Annette ejaculated. "It ees so wiz me *aussi*. *Oui, oui, moi aussi*."

"I'll try." Lucia rose gracefully. "Will you darken the room, Mr. Stirling?"

Gramling arose with alacrity, and Trimble sank into an easy-chair. The lights went out. They saw Lucia in her white dress moving toward the piano like a cloud caught by a shifting search-light.

The room was still for several minutes. Then they heard Lucia say: "Wait—wait, I think I can. Madame, you are helping me. I feel it. Oh, how calm you make me!"

"It ees me not, ma'mselle," Annette corrected, softly. "It comes—it comes to you as to me, *aussi*. Ah *oui*—now it flows!"

Lucia began to play. She had never played better, Gramling thought. Close to him sat the medium, and he could hear her uttering sobs and soft cries of delight in French. Trimble, who had not a musical ear, seemed charmed, and he hardly knew why. Presently Lucia stopped, rose from the piano, and came gliding toward them. She held out her hands and embraced Annette.

"Did you see?" she asked, breathlessly.

"Oh *oui, oui, oui*, ma'mselle! I would die to tell it as I saw. Beyond—beyond as never before

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my eye reached out. They heard—they all heard in the—the meadows of the light. The two came—the two new brothers. I—I—”

There was a pause. Annette was reclining against the back of her chair and breathing audibly.

“‘Sh!” from Trimble. “She is off. I think she was asleep while you were playing, Lucia. Now please be quiet.”

Lucia sat down opposite the medium. The room was still dark.

“Annette,” the professor suddenly said, aloud and firmly, “are you willing to talk to us now?”

There was dead silence, and Trimble, after a moment, repeated his question.

“Yes, yes,” impatiently, “if you insist; but, ah, me love zis repose on ze stream of ze heaven water in ze boat—ah no, not a boat! I say zat for nothing else to say for heem zat you comprehend. Ma’m selle, ma’m selle, where are you?”

To the surprise of the two men Lucia made no answer. They could see her leaning forward, her head supported by her hands.

“Ah, I see her now wiz zee Ashley one—two lights like as one, both joyous as birds in the trees of bliss. But she is not to stay—she is to come back to ze dark place wiz ze hooks to open. Ah, danger again! the Ashley one whispers me, not her to spoil ze joy.”

“Do you mean, Annette,” Trimble inquired,

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“that the detectives are still pursuing Lucia, and to this house?”

“I zink maybe yes, but maybe no—me no sure! It ees not given me to know zat yet. Ah, ze man of hell—zat, zat Dunton one, so dead inside zat ze skin of ze face is of ze grave already the worms eaten. I see heem rub ze hands wiz ze veins filled wiz matter putrid already. Ze money—ah *oui!* It ees mooch, and he zinks it close by now.”

“You still advise me to see him, Annette?” the professor asked.

“Yes, oh yes, and you are to say sure the things I’ve you told. Ze lettaire; you will see it on hes desk. Tell heem as I said. He will wonder—he will fear. You have cool head already, then you will be astound; even yourself you do not know the power zat to you will come wiz ze hatred of one so vile when you heem see in the eyes. Follow the instructed words to begin, then say what comes in ze mind.”

“I’ll obey, Annette,” Trimble fervently promised. “I’ll do my best.”

“To-night no more, please,” Annette said, wearily. “I am wiz ze great strain in ze nerves zis night.”

“Well, well! Very well, Annette,” Trimble said. “It is a first visit, anyway.”

Lucia sat erect, rubbing her eyes and staring about blankly. “Why, I think I went to sleep,” she said, regretfully. “How stupid of me! Madame, I hope you will pardon me.”

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"Nevare mind, ma'mselle," Annette said, quickly. "It was zu be zat way. I go home now, but I come to-morrow zu stay awhile?"

"Yes, oh yes, and you must not fail," Lucia said. "I want you. I need you."

Trimble was at the door of the *salon* and Gramling went to him.

"You are going to see Dunton?" he said, tentatively.

"Yes, and I have hopes of winning. I can't say why, but I think the chance is good."

"I want to say it, and I trust you will understand," Gramling said. "Trimble, I hope you will spare no expense in this thing. I am ready to furnish any amount—my whole fortune if necessary. You may draw on me at will. It would be my greatest joy to honor your drafts in such a cause."

"Spoken like a man and a—lover of the old-fashioned, knightly brand!" the professor declared. "Well, we may need money. I can't say positively that we'll need any at all, but your words make me feel more secure, for you know we are going in to fight a big money power."

CHAPTER XXX

WHEN the visitors had departed, Gramling went back to the *salon* where Lucia still sat slightly drooping forward.

"Don't you feel well?" he inquired, gently.

"Oh yes, but always after playing I have a sort of soothing lassitude, and it is on me to-night. Madame DuFresne is lovely."

"I'm glad that you like her and that she is coming to stay with you. It will be much better in every way—safer, too, I think, for she really has second sight."

"She doesn't understand all things, however," Lucia answered. "She says she has been trying to find out a certain thing for more than a month, but can make no headway. It seems that someone has sent her anonymously quite a large sum of money. She is sure that it was not her husband, and she can't imagine who it can be. She has asked 'the spirits,' as she calls them, but they tell her she must not know—that the intention of the sender was good, and that must suffice."

"I thought she knew all ordinary things," Gramling said, in a vague tone of relief, which Lucia failed to note.

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"The gift has made her very happy," Lucia went on, "for she is now independent of her husband in every way. Yes, there are many things which she says she does not understand. You will smile when I say that she says you are a great mystery to her."

"I?" in a tone of alarm from Gramling. "Why should she find me mysterious?"

"Because you are." Lucia laughed softly. "You are a mystery to me and to Madame DuFresne—not to the professor, however. I am sure that he understands you. I see it—I feel it."

Gramling was fairly bewildered by the startling exigency of the situation. He was awkwardly silent for a moment. "So I'm a mystery to you, Lucia?" he said, lamely. "And you are the one person on earth that I want to understand me. I wonder if—if you will agree with me that a man has a moral right to withhold some things from his best friends when his judgment tells him that such a course is wise, and even to practice mild deception on them?"

"Oh yes, yes, and you mustn't misunderstand me!" Lucia cried, impulsively. "To be frank, I'm sure you have not told me all about yourself, but I know that you are justified in not doing so, as I was in keeping from you the unpleasant things in my life. I don't want you to tell me anything now—I would not listen if you tried. I know it is best. Madame DuFresne says the spirits refuse to inform her about you. They say you are a

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friend and that she must not be inquisitive. Once they called you 'an angel in disguise' and said that you had suffered."

"They were right there." Gramling was referring to the latter statement. "I was the most miserable man alive, Lucia, till you came into my drab existence. But after that—"

"Madame mentioned—" Lucia broke in, and locked her hands in an instinctive movement of regret.

"She mentioned what, Lucia?" Gramling urged, under his breath, in suspense.

Lucia hesitated, and then: "Well, she said that I had been a help to you. She even said that she felt at times that Morten Gramling and my brother had purposely brought us together."

"Something did it," Gramling cried, with conviction—"something marvelous. Some day I'll tell you everything and you will wonder, as I have, over the things that have happened to me this summer."

Lucia was standing now. "Good night," she said. "I've not felt so restful in a long time. It may be due to my knowledge of the secret chamber—to Madame DuFresne's coming, or the—the constant assurance of your deep interest in me."

"I wish that last were it," Gramling returned as she was leaving him, but, looking back, she simply smiled and walked on to the stairway.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE next day but one Trimble went to the hotel where Richard Dunton was staying. Dunton was expecting him, and received him in a luxurious little sitting room, the windows of which looked out on Fifth Avenue. He fitted well the description Annette had given of him. He was a man about forty-five years of age, bald, pale as a life prisoner in an unlighted cell. He was nervous, had alert brown eyes, and was suave and courteous.

"Your fame has preceded you, Professor Trimble." He smiled as he rose from his desk and held out his hand. "Doctor Clayton has certainly sounded your praises. He mentioned your published works, and I feel quite ashamed to say that I have not read them. I am not a reader, being only a plain business man with many financial irons in the fire."

"Oh, we'll throw my writings out of the window," Trimble jested. "They don't count, Mr. Dunton. I always feel that literature is a weak thing when I meet men of affairs."

The banker proffered a chair and resumed his own at his desk, his pale fingers toying with a glass paper weight. On the brown blotting sheet

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under his eyes lay a letter sealed and stamped ready for posting. From where he sat Trimble could not see the name and address typewritten on the envelope, but his faith in Annette's prophetic power increased.

"Clayton spoke to me of your kindly interest in the sad case in my immediate family," Dunton pursued, "and I appreciated it, coming from a man of your renown. Clayton said you were quite interested and sympathetic."

"Yes," Trimble said, calmly enough, "it happens that a beautiful young lady friend of mine was confined for a long time. Fortunately she is out now and has every prospect of remaining free."

"Cured?" asked Dunton, indifferently.

"In this case a big mistake was made," Trimble replied. "If I had been called on I think I should have advised her staying at home. The truth is she was saner than any of her judges. It is a complicated case and I shall not go into it. I may as well be frank as to the object of my call, Mr. Dunton. I'm looking out for number one and I decided to offer my services to you as a psychologist."

"But"—Dunton lifted his thick brows in slow surprise—"did not Clayton tell you that it was decided?"

"Oh yes, he told me of the verdict of the court, if that is what you mean, but I have no reference to that. Clayton spoke to me of the deep brotherly grief under which you are suffering—"

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"Oh yes"—Dunton accomplished a drooping face—"that is terrible, of course. She was so young, beautiful, and talented. But it was unavoidable. Her mother was touched in the same way, and her brother who died was very odd in many ways. But of course the matter is settled now, so far as the services of an alienist are concerned. Her case was shown to be quite hopeless in every way. But of course there is no good in grieving over what cannot be avoided."

"Perhaps Doctor Clayton didn't tell you," Trimble went on, "but my chief work now consists of restoring minds to their normal equilibrium, and knowing how you feel in regard to your young sister—"

"*Half* sister," corrected the banker "She is the daughter of my father by a second marriage, but, nevertheless, you may be sure it is a great calamity to me. I was very fond of her, Professor. I hoped that she would really be a companion to me at my lonely home. I had made all arrangements to will her all my interests when this awful discovery was made."

"Yes, yes," said Trimble, "and it is because of your great sorrow and a certain hope I have that I am here to see you. I think I can give you ample proof of my ability to restore minds that are temporarily deranged. I am having special success in the treatment of mental diseases of the young. They seem to yield more readily to my peculiar method."

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The banker shrugged his shoulders and frowned almost as if in pain.

"I see that you are not thoroughly posted in the matter," he said, wearily. "This case was shown to be absolutely hopeless from every point of view."

"I'm sure that it took on that phase," Trimble argued, or seemed to argue. "Now, Mr. Dunton, I hope you will pardon a display of professional vanity on my part, but I must say that it has always been the cases where hope has been entirely lost that I have been the most successful. I am sure you can readily see that to win under such conditions is more interesting to a student such as I am."

"I am not prepared to enter into an argument with you," Dunton said, nettled against his will, "but I must say, Professor Trimble, that the matter is too painful to be discussed. Everything has been done that could be done for the poor child."

"I understand," Trimble answered, calmly, his eyes on the letter under Dunton's fingers, "but still I do not want to drop the matter while—it seems to me—you are in doubt as to my ability to bring about a cure."

"Well, yes, I doubt it," Dunton retorted, crisply, "and in doubting it naturally I cannot readily see my way to employing you or anyone, no matter how renowned, to open a question that is closed so far as my hopes and energies are concerned."

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"Not if I could bring you proof of many cases that I have successfully treated?"

Dunton shook his head coldly. "No, for what would look to be proof to you would not be proof to me. You see, I know the patient better than you could possibly know her. Everything was not brought forward in court. For family reasons I withheld many humiliating things."

"Humiliating to whom?" Trimble was staring blandly, his cold eyes on the colorless features before him, his upper lip showing a slight tendency to curl.

"Why—why, to—to any member of her family. I, myself, was reproached by the court and press for allowing her and her brother to remain so long abroad after the deaths of their parents. It was a great mistake, I'll admit, for as their guardian I should have been more careful."

"I see," said the professor, "but still I must insist that I can render material aid to you in the case. From all I have heard of your unfortunate sister she is the very type with whom I have had the most pronounced success. Clayton says she was musical, poetic, imaginative. Such minds are easily led off, and as easily led back, where sympathy and understanding are used."

"If I thought you could do anything I'd agree"—Dunton was still obviously irritated—"but I don't, and that must end the matter. I didn't know that the object of your desire to meet me was of this nature."

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"I see." Trimble's smile was unreadable. "You thought it was a mere social call. Well, no, I'm human. You are a man of means. And with a great heart such as you have I counted on rendering my professional services to you and earning a fair reward. I am going to say it frankly and warmly. Mr. Dunton, I am absolutely sure that within three months I can have the young lady out of the asylum in which she is now confined."

"Asylum—asylum—" Dunton stammered, his voice dying away.

"Yes, or perhaps we'd better call it a sanitarium. It is a private one, of course?"

Dunton's glance wavered under Trimble's piercing stare. "Yes," flurriedly, "it is a private place. The best I could possibly find."

"She has special care, I'm sure?"

"Of course, of course," impatiently.

"Do you mind giving me the name of the institution?"

Dunton frowned; his fingers trembled as they left the paper weight and began to toy clumsily with the letter on the desk.

"It was—is the Sunnyside Home in California."

"I happen never to have heard of it, and I thought I was fairly well informed about the most reliable institutions of that sort, but that does not count. You say she is having the best of attention there?"

"Yes," slowly. "Of course—all that money can supply."

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There was silence for a moment. Dunton had the air of a man exasperated beyond endurance and yet prevented from showing his irritation by the celebrity of his caller and an indefinable something in that caller's grim and persistent attitude. What could it mean? he seemed to be asking his bewildered consciousness. Surely no other man would have acted just as this one was acting.

"I may be taking up some of your time," Trimble remarked, and the tone he used somehow held no shade of apology, "but, Mr. Dunton, when I know what is absolutely for the good of a man and know that I am really the one individual who can aid him, I confess I am tenacious. I am like a surgeon who knows the knife must be used and doesn't care for the opinion or opposition of an ignorant patient. Mr. Dunton, I am going to say something to you that may surprise you, and that is that there are certain laws of life which even the greatest minds in your practical world do not recognize. I wonder if you happen to believe in psychic phenomena?"

"No, Professor"—smiling now more easily—"and I certainly hope that you do not—at least, if by the term you mean the spiritualistic stuff that is now and then recorded as the beliefs of certain once great men in Europe."

"In many ways," Trimble answered, "I am simply in advance of most of them."

Dunton shrugged and permitted himself to smile broadly. It was as if he had found relief,

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in the fact that the imposing personage of whom he had been half afraid was, after all, in need of mental treatment himself.

"You mean that you know even more about ghosts and hobgoblins than they do? Is that it?"

"I mean that for centuries these psychic laws have been understood by the few. Most men are practical minded like you. You understand certain physical laws and use them. It does not occur to you that if you knew even as much as I do about psychic law that you would not have to—well, to come such a great distance as from San Francisco to New York to attend to whatever business you have in hand at present."

"I'd have the spirits do it, eh?" And Dunton smiled as indulgently as if he were amusing a child. "Professor, I do not want to appear discourteous to a man of your reputation, but what you are arguing is the greatest tommyrot in the world."

There was a certain fierceness of mental poise in the professor's attitude when he next spoke. "I see," he said, "you are the type of man who has to have proof. Well, suppose I am ready and willing to give it?"

"Proof? What sort of proof?" still with the amused ease of absolute confidence.

"Why, we'll say," answered Trimble, "some little thing, such as showing you that I have the power to know more about any affair of yours than you could possibly know yourself. That sounds absurd, doesn't it?"

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"I should say so," slowly agreed the other, "but still I cannot quite get your meaning."

"Perhaps I may make it clearer," said Trimble. "Now, let's take up any trivial matter—the letter you have there, for instance. It is ready to be posted?"

"Of course," smiling. "You see that it is sealed and stamped, Mr. Sherlock Holmes. By the way"—rising to touch a bell button—"I must send it down. If you will excuse me, I'll ring for the porter."

"No, don't, please. I am not quite through with my illustration."

"Well," smiled the banker, resuming his seat, the letter in his hand, "what next?"

"Why, I want to show you that if you really were not ignorant of the great laws in which I am interested, with other serious students of the occult, you'd not send away a letter like that."

Dunton's face broke into a confident smile. "What is wrong about it?"

"Wrong about it?" Trimble repeated. "The thing for me to ask you is if *you* know whether there is anything wrong about it."

"No, I know nothing wrong about it. It suits me, all right. I dictated it to my stenographer, who happens to be out for a walk just now. She doesn't often make mistakes, and she did not in this, for I went over it carefully. It is a rather important bid I am making on a piece of property in the West which I think may be bought cheaply."

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"I see," said Trimble, "and you say you really want to buy the property?"

"At my figure, yes. But what has all this to do with—"

"I am only trying to show you that you need occult laws to prevent you from making even business mistakes. Do you know, Mr. Dunton, that you would never receive an answer to that letter—that it would simply be thrown into a wastebasket and your bid not considered for a moment?"

"Why, why, what is the matter with you, sir?" Dunton stared stupidly. "What do you know about this letter?"

"More than *you* do"—Trimble smiled—"and that is my point. I set out to show you that I could conduct your affairs better than you can yourself. The letter was, as you say, correctly written on a typewriter, but you failed to sign it."

"I—I— You say that I *failed to sign it*?" Dunton stared and stammered.

"Yes. Would you mind opening it? You might as well. If it went in that condition the men to whom it is addressed would not have the slightest idea who sent it."

"Have you come here to play a joke on me," demanded the now angry banker, "or are you, yourself, demented?"

Trimble smiled as he stood up and took his hat. "Surely, Mr. Dunton, you can't think I am demented if I am capable of correcting your mistakes."

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Dunton's fingers quiverèd as he took up a letter-opener and slid its slender point under the flap of the envelope. He took out the sheet and opened it. Trimble saw him start, turn pale, and sit, drooping, in sheer bewilderment.

"I don't understand. I—I—" he began, and broke off, an inane smirk on his bloodless face, his whole frame quivering.

"Of course you can't." Trimble smiled carelessly. "Now I must be going. I am sorry you will not consider my proposition in regard to the mental treatment of your unfortunate sister. I am quite as confident of my ability to restore her mind as I was that you had made the mistake in regard to that letter. Think it all over."

The banker stood up. He was still pale, his brows knitted in perplexity and even fear. "I can't consent to the treatment," he said, haltingly. "I have—have given up hope in—in that direction."

"I have not," answered the professor, in a significant tone. "Your sister will be in my care very shortly, and with your full legal consent as her guardian. You have my address. I shall see you again soon. I wonder if I am saying this as positively as I told you about that letter—well, I mean to do so, for I am absolutely sure of my ground, and you may be sure that I thoroughly know the man with whom I am dealing. Good morning."

CHAPTER XXXII

TRIMBLE did not offer his hand, and Dunton seemed too stunned to engage in any formality whatever. In a low voice he echoed Trimble's good morning, and stood with eyes cast down till the caller had left. He heard the elevator ascending and the sound it made when it stopped on that floor. Peering through an aperture of the door, he saw that Trimble had gone down. Dunton went back to his desk, took up the letter, stared at it wildly, frowned desperately, and muttered something unintelligible. He had had vast and varied dealings with men, from the shrewdest down, but a man like this never had crossed his path. What could it mean—the uncanny demonstration just made and the odd persistence of the psychologist in regard to the treatment of Lucia? What did the man know, and what were his designs?

There was a rap on the door. Dunton started and fell to trembling.

"Come in," he managed to say. The door was opened and a man stood smiling suavely on the threshold. It was Redwood, the chief of the detectives Gramling had seen in front of Mrs. Carr's house.

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"I'm a little late," he began, seating himself in the chair Trimble had used, and holding his straw hat on his knee. "I suppose you are anxious to know how we are getting on?"

Dunton said nothing for a moment, and the detective waited in growing surprise while he studied the fallen countenance of his employer.

"Has anything gone wrong?" he presently asked.

"Wrong? Why?" Dunton stared as if waking from sleep. "Why do you think anything may be wrong?"

"Oh, I don't know, except that you don't seem as chipper as you did at breakfast during our talk. I hope you are not losing confidence in the chase. We are narrowing the borders down. The New York men are good ones—high-priced, but they know their line. They are hot on the trail of the young fellow Stirling. He and Lucia are together somewhere not far away. I am expecting a telephone call at any moment and then we'll be ready to go back home."

Dunton leaned forward, the letter folded and in the envelope. "Redwood, I've had a perplexing caller," he said, "and I don't know what to make of him." And therewith Dunton recounted all that had taken place between him and Trimble.

"A bug, a crank—the woods are full of them—faker out and out." Redwood laughed. "Oh, we are on to them. My man Driscoll has made a

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thorough study of all their tricks. This chap simply wants the job he mentioned and resorted to that letter trick to convince you of his power. Let him alone. He is after your money, that's all."

"But Clayton speaks of him as being most eminent in his line," Dunton thrust in, mildly.

"Let him alone; let him slide!" sneered Redwood. "If he is all that, he is after a big fee, that's all. What could he do for the young lady that hasn't been done?"

"Nothing, of course, but you haven't seen this man," Dunton replied. "I don't know what it is, but he has a purpose, and it is a big one."

"Listen to me, Dunton," Redwood suddenly said, with a sharpness of tone he had not used till now. "Has it occurred to you that this thing may be a blackmail game, and one on a gigantic scale?"

"Blackmail? How? What do you mean?"

"I mean that men will do anything for money these days, Dunton, and a man of your standing is exactly the sort of prey the sharpest are gunning for. Suppose this fellow's idea is to get possession of the young lady to prove that—well, you know what I mean."

"But I don't, Quit beating about the bush." Dunton was losing patience. "What are you driving at?"

"Well, I know what I'm driving at, and the

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very bigness of the scheme takes my breath away. He evidently thinks she is still in confinement. What if his idea is to get her out, prove that she is not insane, never was, and that you deliberately plotted to place her under restraint for *an object of your own?*"

Dunton was white with suppressed and helpless rage. "How dare you even hint that—"

"Oh, I'll dare anything to save the skin of a man I'm working for." Redwood's eyes gleamed coldly. "What am I paid for if not to protect your interests? There must be no milk-and-water talks between us two. It is my business to keep you out of trouble, and I think I can do it. If this is a blackmail scheme—and it looks like it—it might be barely possible for a man of this type to rake up a lot of disagreeable evidence against the way the whole commitment business was conducted, the characters of the alienists, witnesses, and hundreds of other points."

Dunton went to a window and glared down on the throng on the sidewalk below and the slow-moving vehicles in the street. Suddenly he turned back. "What would you advise?" he asked, in a conciliating tone.

"I'd advise getting hold of the girl first, and when that is done I'd take her to the other place for safe-keeping. I've got that salted down. Take it from me, we can prove black is white there. I have some attendants ready to go along.

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I know them and they know me. They can be counted on."

"So you think this is blackmail?" Dunton panted, feebly, as he sat down at his desk.

"It looks like it." The phone on the desk buzzed, and Dunton took up the receiver.

"Well?" he asked, and there was an inquiry.

"Yes, he is here. Want to speak to him?"

"For me, eh?" Redwood leaned over Dunton's shoulder and took the receiver.

"Yes, I understand," he was heard to say. "All right."

He hung up the receiver and stood erect. "Driscoll says he has run across a fresh clue." He smiled. "He won't speak of it on the phone, but wants me to meet him at once."

"Fresh clue?" echoed Dunton, but cheerlessly. "Well, go to see him, and come back here as soon as you can. When she's caught it is the new place, remember. California is too far away. I have all the papers ready."

"Yes, we must act, and act in a hurry now," Redwood said, grimly. "I was not counting on trouble from this new source. Whoever is in this thing may be out for big game, and we may find ourselves in a stew."

Dunton went to the door with him. "Come back and report as soon as you can," he said, nervously.

Finding himself alone, Dunton sat down again and drew his brows together in reflection. Some-

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how he could not make up his mind that blackmail was back of Trimble's mysterious visit. No, he finally decided, it was something else, and something to be dreaded even more, for Trimble was not the type of man to resort to blackmail.

CHAPTER XXXIII

ON leaving Dunton, Trimble went to Oaklawn by train. Gramling met him at the door.

"Well, how is our fair prisoner?" were his opening words.

Gramling looked grave and shook his head. "Annette is with her in her room. Lucia has not been down to-day. Annette says she has had a sort of nervous collapse and that the strain has been too much for her."

"I've been afraid of it," Trimble said. "A high-strung constitution like hers can stand just so much and then it caves in. The terrible dread and uncertainty that has been on her would kill many a man. You see, there has not been an hour, day or night, for a long time that she felt absolutely safe."

The two men took seats in the library, and Trimble had just started to tell in detail of his visit to Dunton when Annette came in.

"Oh, it is sad, sad, sad!" she moaned. "My poor young frent—she suffaire so mooch! She lose de courage quite and veep all day, and eat so little as a bird. Ah, glad I am zat I come to her to stay awhile! Listen me well, Professor,

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eef zat man take her, I go, too, back to de place she go."

"He hasn't taken her yet," Trimble said, with a little show of heat. "And from his looks I begin to hope that he won't do so soon, if at all."

"Ah, you have see heem?" Annette cried.

Trimble nodded and recounted what had taken place in Dunton's room.

"Ah, goot, goot—zat lettaire!" Annette gurgled with delight. "I know how zat heem confound. And ze ring—did you tell heem, Professor, wat I said to zay about ze ring?"

"No, I couldn't quite get that in," Trimble answered. "The other was enough, I thought, for a first encounter. I didn't want to overdo it, for I already had him bewildered. I want to say to you both that I am pursuing an unusual course with him, but I believe it is the only one open, and I am sure that I shall see him again. Annette, I thought of your saying that power would be given me when I faced him, for I never felt so full of determination in my life. I actually seemed packed with it, and sent it at him with the force of water from a fireman's nozzle."

"Ah, zat right—zat right!" The medium chuckled, rubbing her hands. "You had ze power of right, and he had ze weak of wrong. Ah, you keep it up and you vill vin ze game! Ze lettaire make heem afraid—ze ring vill, too. Yes, you have ze only vay now. He has ze money and ze

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law wiz him, but you have a power he knows not about."

"Is Lucia unable to come down?" Trimble asked her.

"Maybe, you to see—I inquire?" Annette rose and left the room. Presently she returned. "She want to see you, and she come right down," Annette announced.

Presently Lucia appeared, looking very white and weak. "It is silly of me," she said, with a faint, forced smile, "but It got the best of me."

"All you need is to get your mind off this thing, my dear young lady," Trimble said, encouragingly. "It has haunted you too long."

Lucia smiled wistfully. "It is very well to say get the mind off of a thing, but doing it is sometimes impossible. For a while I felt safe here, but somehow I think now that my presence here is suspected, and I really fear the worst."

"Well, what if it is?" Gramling said. "Have you forgotten that you know about that secret room and that we could get you into it at a moment's notice?"

"No, but— Oh, I don't know, Mr. Stirling, but I am tired of it all—so tired that I want to go to sleep and never wake again."

The remark created a profound impression. The two men exchanged glances, a sob escaped Madame DuFresne and, with her handkerchief to her lips, she rose and went out.

Lucia looked after her, her own eyes moist.

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"She is the dearest soul on earth," she said, huskily. "I didn't know that I could love a woman as much as I do her."

"It is mutual," Gramling put in with emotion.

"Yes, I think so," Lucia answered. Then she got up. "If you will excuse me I'll go to her."

When she had left the room Trimble and Gramling sat bending toward each other. "I've seen individuals that I disliked very much," the professor began, with set lips, "but this man Dunton is the most contemptible wretch I ever saw. It seems to me that he hasn't one single redeeming quality. He would murder his own mother, he'd torture his own child, to make money. He is one of the shrewdest scoundrels that ever lived in all the known channels of villainy. He doesn't, however, know anything of psychic law, and I've already fairly stunned him. He would know exactly what move to make with any other man, but he doesn't know what to do about me. He won't rest, either. I've set him to worrying, and, in my opinion, I've only just begun to handle him."

CHAPTER XXXIV

TRIMBLE was in his office the following afternoon when a servant brought in Dunton's card.

"Show him in here, and by no means admit anyone else," Trimble ordered. "I'm out to everybody. Cut off my phone. Take messages, but don't connect me with anyone."

Quite airily and with forced composure Dunton bustled in, his hat, gloves, and cane in his hand. "Well, well, Professor," he said, "I've always heard that calls should be returned, and as I may have to leave New York by any train I wanted to pay mine."

"Ah"—Trimble smiled as he shook hands—"you are punctilious, Mr. Dunton. Are you sure that it is not a business call? You see, in regard to my services to your sister—"

"Oh no, it is nothing of that sort, I assure you!" Dunton smiled uncertainly. "That is really out of the question, but I'm going to be frank with you and admit, 'right off the reel,' as they say in sporting parlance, that you've got me puzzled in regard to—well, the little sleight-of-hand trick you played on me. I don't pretend to be able to

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see through it, though I understand there is an explanation for every single one of them."

"Yes, oh yes—an explanation," Trimble answered, his eyes bent steadily on the blinking ones before him.

"You admit it, then?" with a breath of obvious relief.

"Oh yes, there is an explanation"—the professor smiled frigidly—"but it is too deep for any but the experienced psychologist to understand."

"But of what use is it?" Dunton said, stupidly. "Of what practical use?"

"How can you ask such a question," Trimble suddenly hurled at him, "when you know you did not send that letter away without signing it?"

Dunton's face fairly wilted. "Yes, I signed it;" he faltered, "and, trick or no trick, I was glad you—you called my attention to it. I am pretty sure in my own mind that the whole thing was simply good guesswork. You had a reason for trying it on me, and you happened to hit it, but you couldn't do it again. Ah, that's where I'd corner you! That's what I came chiefly to say, Professor. You can't do that sort of thing at will."

"Why should I care to give you further proof?" Trimble smiled carelessly.

"Oh, I don't know, unless to refute my confident statement that you simply acted on a guess and happened to hit it. You want to quit winner, Professor, and you'd be foolish to risk another trick that would fall flat. But really you have

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set me wondering, and I'll admit that my curiosity brought me here. One thing I'd like to ask you, and that is this—can this new science of yours really be put to any practical use?"

"Oh yes, decidedly, Mr. Dunton, and that is what interests me in it."

"In what way, Professor?"

"Well, take the enormous and expensive amount of detective work that is being done in this country and abroad. You may not believe it, but one reliable psychic medium can reveal more in a minute than all Pinkerton's force could unearth in a year's hard labor."

"Humph! You expect me to believe that?"

"Not now, but before I'm done with you." Trimble smiled misleadingly. "I happened to misplace some valuable papers not long ago. Do you think I went to a detective agency? No, I simply— Well, I need not tell you how it was done, but in a flash the truth came to me, as did the knowledge of your mistake in regard to that letter."

"What a simpleton you must take me to be!" Dunton said. "You must think I am swallowing all you say. I lost a valuable ring a month ago. It was an heirloom. It worried me a lot, and I offered big rewards for its recovery. I presume if I had happened to meet you I'd have begged you to help me locate it."

"Oh, as for that, it is not too late now." Trimble's eyes were twinkling, and to hide the trium-

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phant glow on his staid face he went to a window and stood looking out, his hands folded behind him.

Dunton's alert gaze followed him. A sickly, half-fearful grimace twisted his lips awry. "Do you mean that you could tell me where it is?" he faltered, and sat all but holding his breath in expectation.

"Oh yes, but I dislike such trivialities, Mr. Dunton," was the sudden reply. "It is an insult to a great science to use it in that sort of way."

"Ah, I see, you have your loophole," laughed Dunton, more at ease. "You intend to play safe on that one success of yours."

"No, but if you really value the ring it would be a pity to let it remain where it is at present."

"Do you mean to say that you know where my ring is?"

"Yes, and in the way that I know innumerable other things about you."

"I offered a thousand dollars reward at one time," Dunton sneered, incredulously. "The money is yours, Professor, if you will restore my ring."

"I don't want your money," Trimble said, coldly and with a well-assumed yawn of weariness. "But I am willing to help you. The facts are these, Mr. Dunton. The ring was too large for the finger you wore it on, and one day in your bank, when you were greatly upset by news in regard to your sister—we'll say for convenience that you

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heard she was unwell and you were overcome with the fear that she might not recover—well, on that day you had occasion to refer to some papers in the breast pocket of the coat you have on now, and in putting your hand in the pocket, and in your excitement and haste, the ring slipped off. Now, there happened to be a hole caused by the careless stitching of your tailor in the bottom of the pocket. The ring passed through the hole and—”

“And dropped out?” Dunton was staring fixedly, his lower lip wet with saliva and limp.

“Yes, but it lodged in the tail of the coat, and has been there ever since. If you will run your hand over the left side you’ll find it at the very bottom.”

“What? You say that—that—”

“Yes, I can almost see it from here.”

Dunton was on his feet, excitedly feeling of his coat tail. “Well, well,” he stammered, “I—I—think you may be right. I feel something. I’ll cut the thread.”

“Oh no, simply slip it back to the pocket and pass it out through the hole it went in at.”

Stupidly, his brows lowering, his hands fumbling, Dunton finally produced the rare diamond ring.

“I’ll have to confess that you are beyond me, Professor Trimble,” he faltered out, as he put the ring on his finger and sat staring at it vacantly.

“And do you still think that these things are mere tricks?” Trimble asked, firmly.

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"With all respect to you, Professor, I can see no other explanation. I use my reason, you see, sir. I am a man of practical common sense. Now, to be frank—even blunt—one single thought comes to me that knocks your claim into a cocked hat, and, no matter what you may be able to do or say, that thought rises and sticks firmly."

"And what is that?" Trimble smiled quietly, confidently.

"Well, to begin with, you are not the richest man in the world, are you?"

"I? Oh no!" Trimble smiled broadly. "In fact I am a man of little means."

"I thought so, and on that fact alone, Professor, I rest my belief that you simply do not possess the power of foresight you claim. Now, if you could really do these things you could do others of greater importance. You could, for instance, know the condition the stock market would be in at any date and by prompt investment own the earth in no time. No, you have played two good tricks on me. I don't know how they were done, and I will not try to find out, but I do know, sir, that you are not a rich man, and I need go no farther."

Trimble did not wear the conquered look the wily financier expected. On the contrary, his entire attitude was that of calm, suppressed force and quiet amusement.

"Ah, spoken like a genuine money-getter, Mr. Dunton!" he said. "It is always the first

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thought of men of your particular accumulative type. But what if I tell you that this happens to be a fact in regard to the new science—that it simply cannot be used successfully for any sordid or selfish motive? If I'd wanted to earn your thousand dollars reward just now I'd not have been able to restore your ring, and if I'd had any selfish motive for the other so-called trick I gave you I'd have failed."

"Oh! Oh, I see!" floundered the banker. "That is very adroitly put, Professor, and if it is one of your loopholes it is a good big one."

"Call it a loophole if you like," Trimble answered, still smiling in an exasperating way.

It was as if Dunton were trying to dig out some sort of answer from his befogged consciousness, but was unable to do so. He sank back into his chair and sat silent while Trimble resumed his own seat and waited for him to speak. Presently Dunton's eyes began to blaze doggedly and defiantly and he said:

"Well, well, we are getting nowhere. Professor Trimble, I am a man of few words, and I am surprised at myself for dillydallying this way with you. You have a purpose in view—you had it in calling on me. Doctor Clayton tells me—I happened to meet him by accident this morning at his club—and he tells me that you made a point of asking him for an introduction to me."

"Oh yes, I asked him to do me that favor," Trimble answered, blandly. "And I did have a

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purpose in view. As I told you, I am deeply interested in the case of your unfortunate sister, and believing, as I do, that I can cure her by my own method of treatment, I still urge you to give me an order on the institution in which she is at present confined."

"You want to take her entirely into your charge?" Dunton's expression was all but satanic his lip and nose meeting in a quivering sneer.

"Absolutely. I do not want to be hampered by legal forms, the claims of doctors or institutions. And, furthermore, I want it clearly understood between you, as her legal guardian, and myself, as her mental physician, that when I have declared her sane she is to have restored to her all her financial and personal rights."

Dunton glared more fiercely. He bit his lip and frowned. "Well, what is next on the program? I know what you are after. You don't go in for small game. You think I am a man of unlimited means. Well, out with it, Professor, tell me frankly what you would expect in the way of a fee? I've seen it coming for some time and you'd as well state it."

"A fee?" Trimble smiled. "Absolutely no fee at all."

"No fee—you say—you say that—" Dunton's voice trailed off into silence.

"Why, yes, I'd expect to call into action the science of which we have talked, and if I had any desire to earn money by my work I'd fail. No, Mr.

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Dunton, I shall be doing this purely in the interest of science and suffering humanity."

"So money is really not your object?" Dunton stared, white and incredulous.

"No, I simply want a chance, in my own way, to do a great service to your sister."

The banker clenched his fist in his lap, and his eyes flashed coldly.

"But what if I tell you that Doctor Clayton seemed astonished when I asked him if you had any special qualifications in the way you claim, and said that he had not heard of your work in that particular field."

Trimble smiled even more broadly. "It suits me not to tell Clayton, or any other alienist, anything in regard to my methods. At present they concern me alone."

Dunton locked his bloodless fingers tightly. "But if I simply do not believe in your ability, how could I put my sister into your care?"

Trimble leaned toward him and bent his gaze steadily on his blinking eyes. "Oh, that will be all right, Mr. Dunton," he said. "If you do not already believe it, you will very soon."

"You think so, but why?"

"Because you and I will keep up these pleasant little informal meetings until suddenly you will realize the vast expediency of your taking my advice in this and in other matters."

"You have enormous self-confidence, Professor, I must say."

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"Yes, that is one of the benefits of the new science, Mr. Dunton. Now, I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll go at once to a reliable magistrate in my car, and you will give me the legal document I am asking for."

Dunton stood up and took his hat and cane. "Do you know that this thing nearly, if not quite, approaches blackmail, sir?" he cried, breathing hard and trembling.

"We won't argue about that, Mr. Dunton." The professor was standing also. "I'm giving you a rare opportunity to benefit yourself as well as your sister. The psychic forces are winding their thongs about you. Your fall is inevitable. The sooner you grant my demands the better it will be for you."

"I'll see you damned first, sir!" Dunton almost screamed, in helpless fury, and shook his cane in Trimble's face. "I know my business and my duty to the law."

"And I know my duty to the *law*, also," said Trimble, "but it is not the law of courts and juries. There is much for you to learn, Mr. Dunton. You are too ignorant to know it yet, but the thing you have always worshiped is of no more benefit to you than a handful of chaff. As I look at you I marvel over your density of understanding. Why, man, your hold on life is no stronger than a cobweb up which a giant hopes to cling. Death has set his stamp on you. You are a walking corpse. Your very

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blood is stagnant; your bones rotten; your sinews like worn-out rubber bands! Do you want me to tell you how and when you will die? I've foretold a few things. Do you want to know that?"

A sickly pallor, followed by a palsied quivering, lay on the banker's jaundiced countenance.

"I know what you are up to, sir," he blustered. "You want to scare me to gain your aims."

"I don't have to scare you to gain my aims," said Trimble. "You will come crawling to me before long, begging to be allowed to do what I am asking. It is only a matter of time. Good morning, Mr. Dunton."

Muttering something indistinctly, Dunton turned and left the room. An automobile was waiting for him at the door.

"Take me through the Park for a drive," he said to the chauffeur. "I need the fresh air."

CHAPTER XXXV

THAT morning Lucia, Annette, and Gramling were in the main *salon*. Lucia, who had quite recovered from her slight illness, had been playing, and a restful mood lay on them all. Presently Lucia and Gramling went to the library to finish some work they had started to do. They were there about half an hour when Lucia looked into the *salon* and came back smiling.

"She is sound asleep," she announced, with a smile. "She is tired out cleaning up. She is as neat as a pin, and always active."

An hour passed. Then suddenly Annette appeared, rubbing her eyes and staring about as if not yet fully awake.

Lucia put her arm about her. "You had a good nap, didn't you?" She laughed softly.

But to the surprise of both the others she stared at them excitedly.

"Danger!" she cried. "Zay come—ze detective mens."

"Come? Where?" Gramling demanded, alarmed.

"Zay hide outside an' watch ze house all around—every side—every door an' ze gates."

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"I knew it—I felt it!" Lucia gasped. "I was trying to fight it off."

"Hurry! Ze room below! Quick!" Annette ordered.

"Are you sure?" Gramling asked, bewildered.

"Yes, sure, monsieur!" She put her arm about Lucia and drew her toward the stairs. "Come!" To Gramling, "Open ze door."

But he was already in advance of them. As he hurried down the basement stairs he heard Annette trying to console her charge.

"Eet is only for little while, my dear. Do not lose ze courage. I stay wiz you, too. Monsieur lock us in, both."

"No! Oh no!" Lucia protested with a steady voice and looking to Gramling like a condemned young queen being conducted to a dungeon. "You must be outside to warn me, and Mr. Stirling will need you."

"Don't consider me," Gramling turned back to say. "I don't need attention."

"Well, yes, I stay out," Annette consented. "I must see Professor Trimble. He will come to-day."

"Let me!" Lucia begged, as Gramling was about to turn the hooks which unlocked the door. "I want to see if I have forgotten."

She was successful. The secret door opened, and the light was turned on in the chamber below.

"Now shut me in!" Lucia said, quietly. "I am too much trouble, my friends. This will never do."

She embraced Annette, gave Gramling her cold,

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soft hand, and turned away. Gramling, a look of despair in his eyes, his jaws set, closed the door, finding himself face to face with the Frenchwoman, whose eyes were moist.

"I'm sorry for you, too, monsieur," she sobbed. "For you love her deep in ze soul, an' zis is ze rack of pain to you. Ah, I know, Monsieur Gramling, zat—"

"Gramling?" he ejaculated.

"Ah *oui*, monsieur—I know zat, too. Your brozzer—zat Morten—me have told, but Lucia must not know. No, not yet. It would spoil all now. She feels independent wiz ze work an' ze money she zinks she makes now. Some day, yes, monsieur, but yet it is not ready. Ze Morten an' ze Ashley wish it not."

"I'm glad you know who I am," Gramling said. "Now you will know that everything here may be used for her. I have ample means. Call on me for any amount you need for yourself or her."

"I understand, monsieur. Now from ze window I wish to see if zay still watch ze house."

They went to the third floor together and looked out from several windows, but saw no indications of the presence of anyone. An automobile was entering the gate. It was Trimble's and they hastened down to meet him at a rear door to which he had driven.

"Quick! Have heem enter quick so zay see heem not eef possible!" Annette warned. "But zat ees safe—for zay come not close enough."

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The news quite upset the professor. He looked very grave as he followed the others into the *salon*.

"Something must be done!" he said, angrily. "This can't keep up. Lucia can't stand it. Annette, you must help us. We are at the end of our rope."

"Let me alone be quiet in my room awhile," Annette said. "But I am too excite', I think. I nevere see and hear when excite'. But I try now."

When she had left the room Trimble, still with his grave and troubled air, faced Gramling. "I've taken you at your word and drawn on you for some money—five thousand dollars. I needed it to—"

"Don't bother to explain!" Gramling waved the subject aside. "As I've told you, my entire fortune is at your service in this matter. This delay and uncertainty is worse than death. If you'd seen the look on that poor girl's face as she went into that room just now—"

"Never mind—throw that off!" Trimble said. "But I must explain about the draft on you. I found that I needed expert legal advice and went to Stapleton and Wrench—the best lawyers in America. I wanted their best work, and so I told them about you and your willingness to back the matter up financially."

"That was all right; I'm glad you did it."

"That was several days ago," Trimble resumed. "And since then they have looked up the law

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thoroughly and found out a lot about Dunton and the case in general. I have just left their office and am sorry to say that they are quite concerned over the plight you and I are in, as they view it."

"You and I?"

"Yes, for interfering with the process of the law without authority. They say Dunton's case is the most thoroughly protected of anything they've met in their experience. He has left nothing undone. He has scores of witnesses to all sorts of doings and sayings of Lucia's that I know never happened. Both Wrench and Stapleton seriously doubted our ability to interfere. It seems that Dunton holds a card that he has not yet played, and that is this: in taking charge of Lucia and keeping her concealed without proper legal authority we are chargeable with a very grave offense, and he could promptly use it. In the eyes of the law she is a dangerous individual and under the sole care of her guardian. And that you, under an assumed name, aided by me, should do what has been done—"

"I see," Gramling broke in. "But so far our part in the matter is unknown, I presume."

"Yes, so far. You, as Hillery Gramling, are supposed to be abroad, and the fellow 'Stirling' is simply a nobody whom Lucia ran across on the East Side. But it would be awkward for you to be summoned to court, and it would be the same for me."

"No matter what happens to me," Gramling

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said, "I shall stick to Lucia. Do you expect the detectives to search the house?"

"At any moment now. In fact, I don't know what they are waiting for. Gramling, I can't go into my plans thoroughly just now, but I'll say this for whatever comfort it may give you. As I see it, there is only one chance of saving Lucia from this scoundrel's clutches, and it lies in the rather subtle method I am pursuing with him. With the help of Annette I have faced him with things he cannot explain, and I think he is frightened and, I am sure, alarmed about the state of his health."

"And you hope—"

"I hope to shake the very soul out of his withered body through fear of what he can't explain. If things go well between him and me I hope to have an order from him authorizing me, as a mind specialist, to take entire charge of Lucia. If I can gain that point we would at least have a breathing spell."

"And you have hopes in that direction?"

"They are now the only hopes I have, but the matter is serious indeed. We can't keep Lucia locked up in that room, and I don't believe she could possibly leave this house without being pursued and taken."

At this moment Annette came in hurriedly. She was all excitement, her face was flushed, her limbs were quivering, her hair disheveled, her eyes ablaze.

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"I must you speak alone, Professor. Pardon, monsieur, if you please, this time."

"Oh, that is all right," Gramling said. And leaving the two together, he went to the upper floor and peered from the windows. He had not long to wait. He saw a man with a motorcycle at the front gate who stood idly smoking a cigarette. From another window he saw in the edge of the wood two men who were watching the side and rear doors. That there was one or more guarding the front door he did not doubt, though he was unable to see them, owing to the foliage of the trees and hedges between the house and the road. He thought of Lucia in her dismal confinement and groaned in sheer pain. That he could so love a woman was a revelation to him.

CHAPTER XXXVI

AS Dunton's soft-running motor sped through the Park roadways on leaving Professor Trimble's house that day the banker reclined limply in the cushioned seat. He was profoundly impressed by Trimble's words and manner. The glare of the sunshine on the wide greensward mocked him. Death? The man of science had been brutally frank about his condition. Why had Dunton's physician not spoken of it? He caught his bony wrist and tried to test his pulse, but the movement of the car prevented it. He leaned forward and touched the arm of the chauffeur.

"Far enough," he said, faintly. "Home, by the shortest way." As he was leaving the car at the door of his hotel he looked the chauffeur straight in the eyes and said: "I want you to be frank with me. Am I not looking so well to-day as usual?"

The chauffeur stared, and then dropped his eyes. "Do you want the truth, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, I want the truth."

"Well, sir, you *do* look bad, I must say. I was wondering if the air of New York is best for you

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after California. You don't seem to have been overstrong at any time, but within the last few days you seem to have lost sleep or been worrying. Worry will kill, sir."

Dunton simply nodded, and went into the hotel. He was about to take the elevator to his rooms when he saw Redwood approaching. There was a triumphant expression on the detective's face, but the banker was conscious of a vague feeling of disappointment over seeing him.

"News for you." Redwood beamed and softly chuckled. "Let's get to your quarters right away."

They took an elevator, and were soon at Dunton's door. He fumbled the rather large key at the keyhole, and Redwood with a laugh took it into a steadier hand and unlocked the door. "Dining too much, eh?" he said, unctuously. "I could tell it in your walk."

"Do I look as if I'd been drinking?" Dunton turned on him helplessly when the door was closed.

"Yes, not only by your looks, but by the fact that you are not eager to hear my news. As a rule you—"

"You speak of my looks. How do I look?"

"Well, like—I don't know how to put it, but you know, of course, that you are not a sound man, and—"

"*Not a sound man!* What do you mean?"

"Why, I mean—" Redwood shrugged carelessly. "But what's the use talking about it?"

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I'm no doctor. Besides, we are losing time. Man, we are about to put it over. Clean as a whistle this time."

"Put it over?" Dunton sat down in an easy-chair, exhaled a feeble breath, and looked at his scrawny hands. "You mean that—that—"

"I mean that the New York bunch say they have run our bird to her nest, and it is only a question now of a suitable time and your consent to make the raid. They won't let me in on it yet—claim this is their particular find—but I don't care. They've been trying to get you on the phone all morning."

Dunton twirled his thin fingers as aimlessly as an insane invalid picking imaginary particles from a coverlet over him.

"I was out—I went to see Professor Trimble. He is a remarkable man."

"I've heard so," said Redwood. "He is a mystery to the New York force. They respect him, too, and say he could not be out for blackmail—stands too high, they think. But, say, we are losing time. Let me get at your phone. I want to tell them you are here, so—"

"Wait!" Dunton raised a hand almost in alarm. "I don't want to talk to them to-day. To-morrow will be better. I'm tired—I'm—"

"But they won't wait," answered the detective. "They are crazy with excitement. You see, they have already divided up the money between them—talking about a dinner and—"

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"The money?" Dunton was staring absently.
"What money?"

"Why, the ten thousand that you are to hand them on their guaranty of a turnover. The other fifteen, you know, is to be paid as soon as you receive the young lady in good order. Take it from me, Dunton, they won't sleep to-night without your check. They will be here any minute now. They say they have complied with the first step in the agreement and they want the cash. As for myself, you know, I am to get another five thousand when they get theirs. I owe a few bills that—"

"Stop!" Dunton growled, sullenly. "I did not agree to pay anything at a moment's notice like this. I'm under the weather, and tired."

"Well, call them on the phone and fix it for to-morrow morning," Redwood suggested. "But as for my check, I want it now. I can bank it, all right."

"I won't talk to them—not now, anyway," Dunton said, doggedly. "As for your check, I'll make it out."

"Very well, and I'll wire them some lie or other and put 'em off, but you may count on 'em being around early in the morning. Chaps like them are friendly enough till cash is held up, and then they get nasty."

"Get nasty?" Dunton's eyes were staring vacantly.

"Oh yes, they are no fools. They know their

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game. For instance, they know that you don't want all this in the papers, and they would hold that over you. I'll tell you—where are your blank checks?—I want to get mine before the bank closes. You might as well write out both. I'll deliver theirs, and you won't have to see them to-day."

Dunton shivered. He fumbled in his pocket and finally got out his check book and fountain pen. But the pen refused to flow, and Redwood, with a laugh, took it and began to shake it. At this moment there was a buzzing of the phone. Dunton, with a frail lunge, reached it.

"Hello!" he said, faintly, and cleared his throat and repeated the word.

"Oh, Mr. Dunton!" came quite clearly. "This is Professor Trimble speaking."

"Yes, yes. What is it?" Dunton faltered.

"Pardon me for using the phone," Trimble answered, "but I have just got into touch with my most reliable medium. Through certain psychic channels she knew of my interview with you to-day and she says there is an important thing which I should have told you in regard to your physical condition. Would you care to hear it?"

"No," said Dunton, shortly.

"Well, it is of small importance," came back from Trimble. "No doubt you will discover it, anyway, sooner or later. Come to see me again. I enjoyed your visit. Good-by."

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"Good-by." Dunton hung up the receiver and muttered something.

"I didn't think they would let you rest long." Redwood smiled. "That was the captain, wasn't it? Pen's all right now."

Dunton made no answer. Redwood was extending the pen, and as the check book lay opened on the table he picked it up.

"Mine first," he chuckled. "I want to see the figures. No soft snap—this sleuth business. Think how long I've been on this job alone, and others to tip and pay. Was that the captain?"

"No." Dunton held the check book open and took the pen, but his fingers quivered and the pen fell on the blotter. He attempted to take it up, but failed. Again and again he tried, but in vain.

"Why, man, what is the matter?" Redwood asked, startled.

"I'm not—not well," Dunton gasped, leaning back in his chair and panting. "I can't write."

"Bosh! Rubbish!" Redwood cried. "Let me fill the blanks, and all you'll have to do will be to sign them."

Dunton's head rocked helpless consent, and Redwood filled the blanks swiftly. "There you are, boss," he said. "Your hand will be all right. It is what they call writer's cramp—comes and goes with some."

Dunton's hand quivered badly, but he finally managed to affix his signature to the checks.

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"Thanks—thanks, all right," smiled the detective. "And shall I tell them you will let them know when you are ready for the arrest?"

"Yes, yes, yes," impatiently. "I'll let them know."

"All right," Redwood said, "and I'll notify the attendants to get ready. It will be a private car, of course?"

"Yes, but make no arrangements yet," Dunton said. "Now leave me, Redwood. I want to lie down a little while."

"All right, boss; it will do you good. I'll tell the captain to let you alone for to-day."

CHAPTER XXXVII

GRAMLING, after surveying the grounds from the upper windows of the house, descended to the *salon*. He saw Trimble enter a telephone booth and heard his muffled voice. Annette, still agitated, was seated on a sofa. Seeing Gramling, she rose and came to him.

"Zat professor is a great mind," she said. "If any man save Lucia it is heem. Ah, he is a wonder!"

"Yes, and we are fortunate to have him," Gramling answered.

Something in Gramling's face or voice riveted Annette's attention, and suddenly she caught his hands and pressed them.

"Poor dear man!" she said, fervently. "Zis is you kill, monsieur—because you are helpless and she is so mooch abuse'. Listen me, monsieur. You must hope zat all will be well soon. Listen me, monsieur. Lucia is all alone below. Why not you go keep her company for a little while? She suffaire so alone."

His face filled with sudden heat. "I am afraid I'd be intruding," he stammered. "Really, Annette, she has never given me the slightest ground

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for hope that I could ever be more to her than a friend."

"Ah, of course not." Annette shrugged. "Surely you do not understand. She is like zee sensitive flower, monsieur. Ziz thing wiz a proud soul is awful. She zay she nevaire marry any man wiz zat on her name. Ah no, eef she you love she nevaire let you know. Yes, I wish you go to her now. Maybe it be well. Ef zee mens come an' find you both gone zay would zink you fled to-gezzar by ze nighttime as once before. I vill ask professor wat he zink."

She went to Trimble as he was leaving the booth, and both turned and came to him.

"I really think it would be a good idea," Trimble said. "I shall remain here to-day, anyway, and Annette and I can meet the detectives. I can offer a plausible reason for my presence. I can claim that I am using the library. As for Annette, she may pass as a housekeeper. Yes, you ought to go keep Lucia company. I will let you know when the coast is clear. If I rap three times on the door you may know all is well."

Glad of the opportunity of seeing Lucia, Gramling went down to the secret chamber. He unlocked the door and, entering, closed himself in. To his surprise he found the place in total darkness, and turned on the light. Then, standing on the narrow stairway, he called out:

"Lucia! Lucia! Where are you?"

"Here, Mr. Stirling!" And she came to the

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foot of the stairs from the chamber, and, shading her eyes from the light's glare, she peered up at him almost eagerly. "Have they left?"

"No, not yet, Lucia," he answered in his throat, for her appearance touched him deeply. She seemed so forlorn, so frail, so patient. He heard her sigh in disappointment and went to her. He took her hand and she made no resistance, such as she had always made before.

"Then why did you come?" she questioned, with the bland simplicity of a weary child.

"Annette thought," Gramling answered, "and so did Trimble, that if we were both locked in here when the detectives came to search—"

"That was not it," Lucia broke in. "Annette, the dear soul, wanted me to have company. Well, you are welcome to my home, sir." It was impossible not to detect the bitterness in her tone.

"But you were in darkness," Gramling said. "The light was turned off. Why was that?"

"I did not do it." She surprised him by the affirmation. "But it happened. It was supernatural. I've had a strange experience, Mr. Stirling. But, to begin with, I'm going to confess to absolute cowardice."

"It will be a false confession, then, Lucia." He tried to speak lightly as they walked across the thick rugs to a comfortable couch.

"No," shaking her head. "This time I was completely undone—quite as I was the day I thought of ending it all at the Subway train, you

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remember. I came here to this couch"—she sat down and motioned to him to sit beside her—"and, lying here, I tried to fight it off. But oh, the awful quaking terror came back again and again! Then I heard a snapping sound and the light went out. At first I thought you had switched it off from above, but I soon knew that it was done by some invisible hand. The darkness became most soothing and wrapped me about like a robe of gentle sympathy. Ah, I've had rare psychic experiences, but none like what came to me here. See"—she laughed helplessly—"I'm like Annette. I can't describe it. The darkness began to dissolve like night broken by sunrise—no, not sunrise. That is too tawdry, too cheap, too glaring."

"I think I understand," Gramling said, tenderly.

"Oh no, you don't!" Lucia shook her head firmly. "No one who has not experienced it can understand. As Annette says, it was music and yet not music; light and yet not light. Out of it came Ashley, my brother. He was smiling, and yet his smile was grave and concerned.

"'Be brave! Do not despair!' he said. 'We are working for your release.' He seemed to come near me, and yet there was a great chasm of some sort between us, and flowing currents of fluid matter that rose and subsided like the swells of an ocean under the blaze of an indescribable, far-away sun.

"'Oh, Ashley,' I cried out, 'take me with you!'

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"But he shook his head. 'It cannot be,' he answered. 'You have to suffer longer, my sister. We can help a little, but that is all. The forces of Good are working against the forces of Evil in your behalf. You have powerful earthly friends who are serving you.' I tried to hear more, but the billows of light and music were sweeping him away. Presently he was gone entirely. For a while I was wonderfully soothed, but when you came you found me in the deepest despair."

Gramling took her hand and she made no resistance, allowing him to stroke it gently.

"Lucia," he said, passionately, "you can't imagine how I felt when we shut you in just now."

"Yes, I can," Lucia said, "for I know how I'd feel if I'd seen you like this."

"But you are a woman—and that makes a big difference," he argued. "Men have inherited the feeling that they should bear the brunt of the ills of life, and to have to stand powerless and see a gentle girl—"

"Stop!" She smiled sadly and placed her disengaged hand on his lips. "You are making a baby of me." She was trying to speak calmly, but her lips quivered and there was a growing shadow in her eyes.

His emotion surged up within him and broke in his eyes and throat. He tried to quell the storm within him, and sat shaking under it like a great tree in twisting rain and wind.

Lucia suddenly pressed his hand. She half

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raised it to her lips and then lowered it to her lap. "Oh, I am so grateful for your—your love. I need it—oh, I need it! It is so sweet and comforting. I am losing hope of ever being free again, except by death. Death seems so cool and restoring, but your love will be eternal."

"Yes, it is everlasting," he affirmed. "Lucia, if you were to die—you are not to die now—but if you were to die I'd not be able to live without you."

She pressed his hand again. He felt her warm throbbings enter his being, filling him with bliss. "Yes," she said, "and if you were to die I would—" She paused, the impulsive tension of her fingers relaxed.

"You would what, Lucia?" he panted, in the vast calm of expectancy.

"I mustn't say it." She lowered her head, and pressed a hand to her lips.

"But why, Lucia?" He put his arm about her waist and drew her close to him. For a moment her head rested tranquilly on his shoulder. Her sweet, suffused face, with the parted, flowerlike lips, the somber, lash-veiled eyes, was close to his.

"Because of the abominable curse that is on me," she replied, bitterly. "I'd never go to you like this, though I know that you would take me in spite of it all."

"But you *are* mine!" he cried, rebelliously. "You are mine throughout eternity. Why shouldn't you be mine here and now? Lucia,

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why should you not be my wife at once? Trimble can make all arrangements, and we could be married here."

"No." She raised her head, a hand on his lips, for he was bending to kiss her. "No, I shall not be your wife. My pride would not permit it. If my name were clear— But never mind—we must not think of marriage."

"I can think of nothing else," he declared, pressing her to him again, and kissing her lips, eyes, and brow.

"I know." She shut her eyes and sighed. "But it is not to be. At any moment I may be taken, and we'd never meet again in this life."

He felt her body quiver as a sob rose in her breast and was stifled. His face was twisted in pain at the thought she had advanced, and, noting the expression, she raised her lips to his and with her hand drew his head down.

"There," she said. "I didn't think I'd ever do that, but I have. Now you may know how much I love you."

"I simply can't realize that you do," he murmured, and then he groaned. "Oh, Lucia darling, if only I could be here in your place! That is what pains me—you have to be treated like a murderess in a dungeon while I am free. I can't stand it."

"I know." She sighed and she drew herself erect and sat away from him under the wave of reserve which so often submerged her.

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"Do you want me to go now?" he faltered, bewildered by her change of mood.

"Oh no," she answered. "I love to be near you, but I am morbid at times. I've been so happy here working with you that when the memory of what I escaped from and what may be for me again comes over me it fairly crushes me. I try to be cheerful and hopeful, but I simply cannot. I wonder if any other girl ever had to go through with such persecution and face such dreads as mine."

"Never on earth," Gramling groaned; "and it is damnable. The author of your trouble must be made to suffer. There is no God if he goes free."

"Oh yes, he will suffer," Lucia assented. "I think he is not so low but that he has some part of a human conscience. All evildoers suffer in the end, and I know that he will do so."

Here they heard three distinct raps on the door, and Lucia fell to trembling.

"It is all right," Gramling assured her. "It is Trimble's signal that I may safely come out. Stay here, however, and I'll open the door."

It was both Trimble and Annette. The latter held a tray containing a delightfully prepared lunch, which she bore to the couch where Lucia sat.

"Annette wants to spend the night here with her," Trimble said. "And I'd like to see you before I get away. We must map out our course of action. Shut them in. Let's not take the slightest chance of having this retreat discovered."

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"Are the detectives still on guard?" Gramling inquired.

"Yes, and why they don't go ahead puzzles me. I'd like to hope that the delay is due to my unique treatment of Dunton. I have bewildered him as he was never bewildered before. He doesn't know whether I am man, beast, or devil."

"I've been wondering," Trimble went on, when they had reached the library, "what they will do if they search the house and fail to find Lucia. There is one contingency that is most unpleasant to contemplate, and that is this: you know they would have the authority to arrest you as a witness, if not, even, as one charged with aiding Lucia to escape. And it is my duty to remind you that you, yourself, might find yourself in a most awkward situation in the power of a dangerous bunch of angry men. It is all well enough to assume the name you have taken and change your appearance as you have by your beard and dress, but to swear to being someone other than Hillery Gramling would be a perilous undertaking. Under cross-examination you'd fall, certainly, and there would be the danger, too, of your being recognized."

Gramling smiled. "Do you know," he said, "that I'd simply love to be sent to jail in this matter. If Lucia goes back to confinement, and there is no hope of securing her release, I'd want to suffer as she is suffering."

"Nobly said!" cried the professor, "but that

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must not be thought of while there is the slightest chance of Lucia's release, and I have a faint hope of bringing that bloodless devil to his knees. Now, Annette and I have talked it over and agreed that we ought to lock you and Lucia in together, Annette remaining as a pretended housekeeper who can blandly tell any lie we wish as to your and Lucia's departure."

Gramling frowned. "I could not thrust myself on Lucia's privacy in that way," he said, stoutly. "Not to save my worthless skin, at any rate."

"Nobly said again!" Trimble laughed. "The sentiment is fine, but not wholly rational. Now, my opinion is that our little girl is quite wrapped up in you, and for you to be in jail would by no means lessen her own woes. So you'd better—"

"No, it cannot be." Gramling shook his head firmly. "I shall stay out here and face the music, come what may. I want to meet the detectives. I think I could lie as coolly as Annette or anyone else."

"Well, then, I must be off," Trimble said. "I must by some hook or crook get at Dunton tonight and force him to call these men off. Annette and I have prepared an interesting program for his entertainment."

"Shall we see you to-morrow?" Gramling asked.

"Yes, if possible. Now for my car and an early contact with our villain."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

DUNTON'S right hand was still limp and powerless, and he scarcely slept for thinking about what it might portend. He sent for a distinguished physician, and received the man in his sitting room. Dunton sat aghast under the steady scrutiny of the doctor, who perfunctorily felt his pulse, looked at his tongue, and tested his heart.

"You've been, and still are, under a great mental strain," the doctor said, with an obvious tendency not to meet the patient's eye. "I think you've had a stroke."

"A stroke? You mean—"

"Yes, it is an unpleasant thing to say, but that is my opinion."

"But—but what can be done?" stammered the bewildered Dunton.

"You'll have to take your mind from all activities at present," was the answer, deliberately uttered. "You are really in a very critical condition. To be frank, you might drop at any moment. May I ask if it is business that is driving you at such a pace?"

"Yes, and—some other things," Dunton fal-

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tered, in the tone of a frightened child groping in the dark.

"Well, there is no other advice that I can give you." The doctor looked at his watch. "Medicines will do you no good at all, Mr. Dunton. You must have a change of thought, or give up thinking altogether for a while. Your mind is out running your frail body."

"So you think I'm in a dangerous condition?" Dunton asked, under his breath.

The doctor hesitated. "Do you want me to be absolutely frank?" he inquired, after a moment spent in an insincere scrutiny of the room.

"Yes, I want the truth."

"You are in a most terrible condition," the doctor answered. "I would not be so blunt, if it were not for your own good. May I ask if your affairs are settled as you'd like them to be in case of your demise? I mean have you made a will or do you care to do so?"

"No, I have not made a will." Dunton's glare was all but that of the glazed eyes of death itself. "There is no one to whom—to whom I'd care to— But what is to be done?"

"I've already told you, Mr. Dunton. Surely, with death staring you in the face, you can give up business. I'm afraid I'm losing patience with you. I'd like to help you, but if you refuse to listen to my advice I am helpless. I think you ought to appreciate the fact that you have met a physician who does not give you a lot of worthless

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medicines as other doctors, no doubt, have been doing, for it seems that no one has told you the truth." The doctor was rising. "Let me hear from you if I can help you," he said, at the door.

Dunton started to put out his limp hand, but let it fall. "I can't use it at all," he said. "Will it stay this way?"

"I'm afraid so, and it may grow worse. What I'm saying, Mr. Dunton, may sound blunt, but it strikes me that you are not the sort of man to readily heed the kind of advice I've given."

"There are things that have to be put through," Dunton said. "After a few days I think I shall be in a position to take the rest you advise, but just at present I can't stop."

"Well, then, I'm sorry for you, Mr. Dunton," the doctor answered. "Keep up the mental strain you are now under and medical science cannot even delay your end."

After the doctor was gone Dunton sat down at his desk. He was limp from head to foot. Death? Was he really so close to it as the doctor had affirmed? He tried to pick up a pen with his nerveless fingers, but it rolled about on the blotter and eluded his grasp. Dunton groaned. He stroked his dead fingers with his left hand in a vigorous effort to revivify them, but the process seemed only to drive from them what little blood remained in them.

Just then his telephone buzzed, and with his left hand he took up the receiver.

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"Redwood again—damn him!" he muttered.
"Why doesn't he give me a rest?"

But it wasn't Redwood.

"Do you recognize my voice, Mr. Dunton?" came over the wire in a soft, insinuating tone.

"No. Who is it? Who is it?" Dunton retorted, impatiently, his eyes and thoughts on the inert hand splaying out before him.

"You don't know? That's strange," with a low laugh. "Think of the very best friend you have on earth, and you'll spot me."

"Who are you? I'm very busy this morning. I can't jest like this." The banker's voice was husky and insecure.

"Well, I'm Professor Trimble, at my own home."

"Oh!" slipped from Dunton's unconscious lips.

"Yes, Mr. Dunton, and I want to tell you that the man you've just seen knows his profession. He is right about what he said—as to changing your present activities. They are really killing you. But that is not what I want to say. You can't use that hand, you know. Now jump in your car and come to me. I'm the only doctor in the world who can make those fingers work. Good-by. I'll look for you inside of half an hour. I'll stay in that long."

"I shall not come," Dunton said, stubborn in his sheer despair.

"What a joke!" with a far-away laugh. "You know you are coming as fast as possible. Say,

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I'll give you a guaranty, Mr. Dunton. I'll guarantee that you will live till you get here, and that is really more than any doctor could do."

There was an ominous pause. Then Dunton said, recklessly, "Can you do anything for—for—for my hand?"

"Come and see," with a confident laugh. "Your trouble is of the mind, and a mind specialist is the only one who can do you any good."

"Well, I'll come, then."

"All right. Good-by."

In an astonishingly short time Dunton was at Trimble's door. The professor met him in person and admitted him.

"That's right, give me your left hand," Trimble said. "Come right in. We ought to be able to come to an understanding by this time."

"I wouldn't have come, but—"

"But you *had* to; well, that is logical enough." Trimble smiled. "Sit down. That was a frank chap with you just now—not many like him. Well, he's rich and doesn't care for money."

"But how did you know that—that he came to see me?"

"Through the psychic laws you sneer at so much," the professor returned. "You ought to be convinced by this time that I really am able to help your unfortunate sister."

"That's what you called me for?" Dunton breathed forth in awakening suspicion, his brows clashing.

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"Yes, I've quite set my mind on restoring her to happiness and freedom. Now, Mr. Dunton, if I can prove to you that I can help you it ought to convince you that I can, through my peculiar methods, help her. Sit down at my desk there. It is only a harmless experiment."

As if in a bewildered dream the banker obeyed, staring blankly at Trimble.

"What do you want me to do?" he faltered, shrinking beneath his stooped shoulders and blinking guiltily.

"I want to show you something. For some time you have been unable to use your right hand. Now, do you know that the invisible forces or personalities all about us can in rare instances communicate with us?"

"I don't believe it; but I didn't come here to argue with you."

"And I didn't send for you for that," retorted Trimble. "But I want to show you that something or somebody outside of yourself can use the hand which is now powerless. Take up the pen before you."

With a stupid stare of indecision Dunton made no movement.

"Pick it up!" Trimble's tone was that of sharp command, and his eyes were sternly fixed on the banker's.

Dunton's yellow digits squirmed like uncoiling worms and moved toward the pen.

"Pick it up!" sternly repeated Trimble.

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Dunton did so and sat holding it in quite a normal way.

"There! You see it can be done," Trimble went on. "Now take that pad of paper, dip the pen, and see what your hand will do."

Slowly and half frightened, Dunton complied. The pen was poised naturally for a moment, and then he began to write. Presently he paused, stared at Trimble, and said, "Well, what do you want me to do?"

"Read what you have written," the professor said.

"I haven't written anything yet," Dunton said, querulously. "What do you want me to do?"

"But you *have* written something, or, rather, it was written through your hand by a discarnate personality."

Dunton glanced incredulously at the pad, and in his own handwriting saw these words:

"Hell yawns for you. You are on its crumbling brink. Draw back! Draw back! Cease your persecutions and save your soul."

Dunton was paler than ever. Dropping the pen, he rose and stood swaying before his tormentor. He essayed to speak, but his tongue refused to move.

"See, your hand is already dead again." Trimble pointed to the limp member, and Dunton took it into his sound fingers and began to stroke it from the wrist down, a look of questioning terror in his eyes.

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"Interesting experiment, eh?" Trimble went on, with a significant smile. "Well, it is only one of many that I make in the new science."

Limply Dunton half collapsed in a chair, where he remained silent for several minutes. The telephone rang and Trimble went to it.

"Yes, yes, I understand," Dunton heard him saying. "Yes, everything is all right at my end so far. Good-by."

"What do you want with me?" Dunton suddenly sat erect. His eyes were shot with blood. His lips hung limply and dripped with saliva.

Trimble smiled gently and sat down close to him. "I want you to save yourself from the damnable plight you are in, Dunton," he said. "Out of avarice you are trying to rob your own flesh and blood. Your sister is not insane, and you know it. I have set myself the righteous task of securing her rights and freedom, and I am going to succeed. It is only a question of a short time, anyway, till your death would free her, but I do not intend to wait that long. What I demand is her immediate freedom and the restoration of all you have robbed her of. Do you want me to tell you how this thing came about? As her guardian, after your father's death you took charge of her interests. You began, as you used the income, to lust for them. At first you thought you would, through her death in her illness, come into legal possession of them, but when she recovered you hatched up the other charges in the most damna-

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bly adroit scheme ever invented. Hell has aided you. Heaven is thwarting you. You are down and out, and had as well admit it and keep out of jail. I promise not to prosecute you."

Dunton's silence was significant; the fact that his gaze remained fixed on the floor had meaning.

"Do you want to know what I now demand?" Trimble went on, calmly, in a voice that was stern and crisp.

Dunton lifted his eyes and stared inquiringly.

"I shall give you, or rather the power will be given you, to sign your name to a legal document, properly witnessed, in which you admit that you were mistaken in the belief that your sister was not of sound mind, and—"

"I shall not do it," the banker cried, fiercely, and with desperate doggedness.

"Then take the consequences," Trimble said, calmly. And he went to the phone. "I've shown you that I know a few things beyond your ken, Dunton, and I shall now show you the climax."

"What are you going to do?" Dunton struggled to his feet and approached the desk at which Trimble was about to sit to use the phone.

"I am going to turn you over to the police, charged with the most diabolical plot ever hatched. I can prove that every witness you had was paid and was a perjurer out and out. You are a sick man, Dunton, but you will have to begin a twenty-year sentence if you can live through your trial."

"But I haven't charge of my sister now," Dun-

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ton faltered. "She escaped from the asylum and has been at large for several months."

"Yes, and your paid thugs are ready to take her at any minute, and are only waiting your order. Now pay them what is due them and call them off the job. That young lady shall not be harassed another minute by you and them. I know where she is, and she is in the best of hands. It may surprise you to know that an individual worth as much money as you are worth is willing to spend his all to see her free and you behind the bars. She has made friends and good ones since you last saw her, myself among them."

Suddenly a new light seemed to break over Dunton. A shrewd gleam came into his eyes and he actually chuckled as he heaved a sigh of relief.

"I am on to you now," he said, standing boldly erect. "I've been playing with you to see your hand, and I've done it. You think you can turn me over to the police, do you? Now suppose you try it. I have certain authoritative papers under which I can act instantly. This is a gigantic scheme of yours to get possession of my sister's effects before my death, on which you are counting. You say you know where my sister is; so do I, and she shall not remain there long. You know my address. Send the officers there, if you dare."

Trimble, though surprised, was unruffled. "I admit that you have the law of man on your side,

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but not the law that I am going to invoke against you. The law that I command can still your tongue in a second. Try to lift your right arm, Dunton."

Bewildered and grimacing, the banker made the attempt and failed.

Trimble laughed significantly. "That means that the grim thing you dread is creeping upward toward your heart. I can cause it to flow swiftly or retard it. Dunton, your death would not be murder; it would be infinite justice, the defense of the weak against the powerful."

The shrewd look of defiance settled afresh on the banker's pale face. "I know only one thing for a dead certainty," he snarled, like an angry cat, "and that is that you are out after money. There is such a thing as hypnotism, and you may have worked it on me, but through it you will not rob me or my sister. You are trying a high-handed game, but it will fail. I'm going ahead at once."

"You intend to retake your sister?" Trimble asked, still sternly.

"Yes, without delay, and if you attempt to obstruct me I shall have you jailed and exposed—you and everybody connected with your plot."

Trimble smiled grimly. "Then take it from me, Dunton, you will be a dead man before your order is carried out. Good day."

"Good day," Dunton doggedly echoed, and

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with his right arm and shoulder limp and sagging he left the house.

"Take me to Redwood's office at once!" he ordered, as he got into the car.

"Mr. Redwood is waiting around the corner, sir," the man answered.

"Then get him at once."

Redwood was found strolling about on the sidewalk, smoking.

"I had to see you as soon as possible, Dunton," he began. "The captain is tired waiting on you. He is as mad as all hell at the delay, which he can't understand. He is afraid there is something fishy about the final payment."

"Set him to work," Dunton said. "We are off for California to-night."

"California?" Redwood said, in surprise. "I thought it was to be the new place."

"No, California will be better," was the answer. "We have the sanction of the state law and know the officials there."

"All right. Any other orders?"

"No, keep in touch with me at the hotel. I want to lie down and rest. You get the car and attendants."

"All right. The captain says he can put it through in ten minutes. So you'd better get ready yourself."

"I'll be ready," Dunton answered, and drove on.

CHAPTER XXXIX

AFTER Dunton left, Trimble sped rapidly to Oaklawn. As his car entered the gates he saw the detectives lounging about in front, but he pretended not to notice them.

Gramling admitted him and quickly closed the door. "Anything happened?" Gramling asked.

"The house will be searched at once," Trimble said. "How is Lucia?"

"As cheerful as could be expected," answered Gramling, and Trimble heard him swearing under his breath. "She has stood too much. I don't see how she can go through any more."

"I don't think they can possibly find her hiding place," Trimble said. "Now we must map out our plan of action. You are supposed to be at work on the library; I'm consulting the books; Annette is the housekeeper; and I've decided on this: you are to admit that Lucia was helping you here, but suddenly disappeared when you needed her most. Where is Annette?"

"At work in the kitchen."

"All right. Now hurry down and tell Lucia not to be uneasy if she does not see some one of us soon. She may as well be prepared for that.

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But don't stay long. These men may get orders by telephone at any minute. We can't resist the search, you know. It wouldn't be wise, anyway."

Gramling was admitted by Lucia. The lights were on, and she had a book in her hand which she had been reading.

He explained the situation, and he saw her shudder instinctively.

"Can they possibly know of this chamber?" she asked, unsteadily.

"No, I'm sure they can't," he said, "so don't be frightened."

She sighed in a way that belied her words. "I shall not be frightened," she said, resignedly. "But when they have searched will they go away?"

"We hope so, Lucia."

"Well, I'll be all right. It is sweet to know that you are all working so hard for me. I'm very, very grateful."

The somber despair in her eyes wrung his soul dry. He held out his arms to her, but she moved back as if drawn by an undertow of sensitive pain.

"Remember who I am—or who I may be in a few minutes," she muttered, dejectedly.

He was about to answer when he heard someone on the stairs.

It was Trimble, and he came straight down to Lucia. He held out his hand, and took hers.

"I had to see you," he said, a quiver in his usually staid voice. "This treatment of you

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seems so very, very wrong. I want to say to you, my dear friend, that I have grown to be very fond of you since all this began. If you were my own sister I could not feel more keenly for you."

"Thank you, Professor Trimble." Lucia's eyes filled. "I couldn't go through with it but for your kindness to me."

Trimble stroked her hand gently and forced a slow smile. "Try to be patient and, if we do not come at once to you, remember that in itself will be a good sign. Annette tells me she has had the forethought to provide refreshments for you."

"Oh yes, I'll fare like a royal prisoner," Lucia said, with a little wry smile. "She has left every delicacy imaginable."

"I'll run upstairs," Trimble said. "You'd better come, too," he said to Gramling.

"Yes, at once," Gramling answered. When the professor had gone up the stairs he said to Lucia: "I'm sentimental. I don't want to shut the door on you myself. Will you be so good as to close it?"

Lucia nodded, and with a far-away expression in her eyes she put out her hand and drew the door inward.

"Remember the signal," he said, grimly. "Three distinct raps and you may know that all is well."

"I'll remember," she said. She held out her hand, but something in the reserved way she did

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it told him that their parting could be no less formal. Her wounded dignity sat well on her slender form and erect head.

"Good-by," she said, simply. She shut the door and he turned up the stairs. Passing the *salon*, he saw Annette asleep in an easy-chair and Trimble standing over her, a perplexed look on his face.

"She proposed that I put her into a trance," Trimble explained. "She hoped that she might be able to give us some helpful, intuitive information, but so far her sleep has been too fitful."

"Is there anything I can do?" Gramling asked.

"Yes, you've got to kill that fighting mood that is on you. I can see in your eyes that you are ready to jump on the first detective that comes in. That won't do, you know. We've got to be as smiling as a basket of fresh chips, and show them over the place like a house-renting agent smelling his fee. By the way, I forgot to post you about something I did. Last night I had inserted in several of to-day's papers an advertisement."

"An advertisement?"

"Yes, I believe in taking long looks ahead when dealing with a bunch of detectives, and I'm pretty sure the ad. will look plausible enough and give color to our claim that Lucia threw up her job here in the library and skipped right when you needed her services as an assistant. I didn't get a copy of the ad., but it runs like this:

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"WANTED—An expert assistant in cataloguing a private library. Terms liberal. Apply at once to Thomas Stirling. Gramling residence, Oaklawn, N. Y."

"A splendid idea," Gramling said, "but will the detectives happen to run across it?"

"Perhaps not, but they will see the applicants as they arrive to-day—I am sure some will come—and the fact that we are keeping that sort of open house may puzzle the detectives."

"And what must we do with the applicants?" Gramling inquired.

Trimble smiled. "Examine them. Look over their credentials and take one or more on trial. You can pay them off and get rid of them at any time. Now do me a favor. Run to the windows upstairs and see if anything is happening outside. I'll see if I can get anything out of Annette. I'm afraid she is too excited and desirous to help. She works well only when calm."

Gramling was gone only a few minutes when he came down hurriedly. Annette was still asleep in the chair.

"I saw three detectives together near the gate," he announced. "They were talking together when a young woman walked up from the direction of the station with a newspaper in her hand. She stopped, as if to ask the detectives a direction, and showed them the newspaper."

"Good! Splendid!" Trimble chuckled, rubbing his hands. "I'll bet that was a bomb in their midst."

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"They seemed startled," Gramling went on, "and read it one by one, finally handing it back to the girl and pointing to the house. She will ring the bell in a minute."

"All right. You receive her. Show her the library. Play the part with her, too."

The bell at the door rang. "There she is," Trimble said. "Go ahead. Nothing is coming from Annette. I'll wake her, and she or I will answer the bell after this."

It was the young woman he had seen, and Gramling admitted her and began to show her the work that had not yet been finished. She was quite refined, intelligent, and brought good recommendations from several public libraries.

"When can you go to work?" Gramling asked.

"I'd rather wait till the first of next week, if agreeable," the girl answered. "That is three days off, but it would be hard for me to come before then."

"Very well, that will do," Gramling said. "I shall expect you."

He accompanied her to the door, and as soon as she was gone he sprang up the stairs and went to a window, just in time to see one of the detectives hurriedly separate himself from his companions and approach her.

"Good!" Gramling said, under his breath. "She will naturally tell him that she is to get the work."

It must have been so, for with a slow step the

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detective left the young woman, rejoined his fellows, and the three stood in close consultation, their eyes frequently on the mansion. Then another thing took place. A messenger in uniform on a bicycle sped up to them and dismounted, handing one of the detectives an envelope. Gramling saw the man tear it open and three heads bend over it.

Just then he heard someone on the stairs. It was Trimble.

"No help from Annette," he said. "She is awake and will be at the door. What have you seen?"

Gramling told him.

"The ad. trick is working smoothly enough," Trimble chuckled. "That messenger brought an order from headquarters to go ahead. They will act at once. Now for downstairs. You will be at your desk and I'll be nosing among the books like a German pedagogue."

CHAPTER XL

THEY had just reached the library and found their places when the doorbell rang. The two friends exchanged knowing looks and both heard Annette going to the door.

"I've told her about the ad.,” Trimble said, cautiously, “and she understands all the rest.”

“We are officers of the law with orders to search this building,” the two friends heard a gruff voice saying:

“Oh vell, come in, sir,” Annette answered. “Vot is wrong?”

There was a mumbled explanation, and then Annette was heard saying:

“Oh, zat young lady! Uh-huh! I zought zo. She went away so queek an' vas zo excite'.”

“Went? Where did she go?” The raised voice of the first speaker came clearly through the open doors.

“*Mon Dieu!* How I know? Vot she done? Is she steal somezing? I no like her look—she vaz zo secrete. Uh-huh, I zought zo—a t'ief, I'll bet you!”

The detective said something in a lowered tone and came on in. Annette went ahead of them to the library.

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"Meester Stirling," she called out. "An officer to take zat Mees Lingle."

Trimble thought Gramling played his role well, for Gramling leisurely took up his written sheets and coolly faced the three men. One of them he had seen before, and it was this one who addressed him.

"Your name is Stirling, isn't it?" the detective asked, frowning.

"Yes. What can I do for you?"

"You have a Miss Lingle employed here, I think?"

"Not now—she has gone."

The three detectives exchanged glances.

"When did she leave?" the speaker went on.

"I missed her yesterday morning when she did not report to work as usual. I might have suspected something, for she asked for her pay in the middle of the week, which was not according to her habit of receiving it on Saturdays."

At this moment, with a book in his hand, the professor came forward.

"I beg your pardon," he said to Gramling, "but I can't find the companion volume to this Fielding. I've looked everywhere."

"I can't help you," Gramling said, with a frown. "Miss Lingle got everything mixed at that end."

Muttering something, the professor turned away. Then the detective, who had been speaking, again faced Gramling.

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"I believe she is still here," he said, in a brow-beating tone.

Gramling smiled. "Oh, you do?" he said, in a well-assumed tone of surprise.

"Yes, and that you know it mighty well."

Gramling's surprise seemed to grow. His eyes met Trimble's and they fairly twinkled. "Did you hear that?" he asked. "I know where she is."

"What is it all about, anyway?" Trimble blandly asked, an open book lowered from his spectacled eyes. "What is she charged with—shoplifting?"

"It doesn't matter what she is charged with," the detective blustered. "We believe she is still in this building."

"You have a search warrant, surely," said Gramling. "Why don't you go ahead? I have important work to do here, and I am without help at present."

The detective nodded to his two companions, and the three moved to one of the windows and stood in troubled consultation for several minutes. Then the leader came back.

"We don't mean any offense to either of you two men, but we must search the house."

"You are quite welcome," Gramling said, politely.

"May we use your phone?" the detective asked, his look of disappointment heavy on him.

"You are not going to phone the captain, are you?" one of the men queried, protestingly.

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"Yes. Why not?"

"Well, you know how he goes off his nut," the other said.

"All right. I won't yet awhile," the leader agreed. "Go ahead with the search—you know your business."

The three left the library, and were heard on the stairs in the main hall.

"Fine! Good so far—not a bobble!" Trimble said, in an undertone, as he peered coldly grinning above his book at Gramling. "They are completely baffled."

For two hours the three detectives ransacked the house unmolested. Then the leader went to Annette in the kitchen and began sharply to cross-question her. She evidently played her part well, for he left her in high disgust after a few minutes. Indeed, the shrewd woman made it appear that she disliked Lucia, was willing to believe anything against her, and was eager to have her apprehended.

"Zay all no goot—zees American girl," she said, fawningly, to the detective. "First one place an' zen anozzer. A little money in ze pocket, ze silk stockings an' some lingerie an' zen—hoop-la! away. Tell me, meester, has she stole some-zings? I look my zings over an' I mees nozzing yet."

"Go on with your work," the man retorted, with a growl of discomfiture.

"I tell you, meester"—Annette refused to sub-

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side—"ze top of ze house is ze attic, wiz many cubbyholes. Maybe zat girl—"

"Go on with your work!" he repeated, impatiently, and went to the phone at the end of the library. Gramling and Trimble heard him giving a number in a fierce, disgruntled tone. Then:

"Hello, Joe! . . . Yes, it's me. Say, is the captain there? . . . Not in? Where is he?" with a suppressed oath. "Well, tell him I called him up. Is Redwood there? . . . Where did he go? . . . All right. Good-by."

Presently the detectives all met in the hall and seemed to be holding a consultation. Then the leader came to Gramling and said, in a changed tone and with a softer manner in general:

"We are sorry to have disturbed you, gentlemen. We find that the young woman is not here."

"I'd like to know where she is if you happen to locate her." Gramling excited Trimble's admiration by the nonchalant tone he was using. "She has mislaid some valuable notes, and I don't see how I can go on without them."

The detective hesitated, then he said, "We'll keep you posted."

Then he and his companions tramped noisily out of the house. Annette went with them to the door and closed it after them.

As soon as they were gone Trimble came to Gramling, rubbing his hands. "Good piece of work," he said, with a subdued laugh. "They are

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completely off the track. Now let's relieve Lucia's suspense."

"Will it be quite safe yet?" Gramling demurred.

"Why not, with Annette at the door, and it locked?"

They started downstairs and paused to ask Annette to guard the door, but to their surprise the Frenchwoman protested.

"No, no, monsieur!" she cried, excitedly. "Never in the life. Not yet. Oh no, not yet!"

"But why?" Trimble asked, perplexed by her fierce earnestness.

She stood, her hands pressed to her brow, groaned, and made no answer.

"What is the matter, Annette?" Trimble demanded. "Are you unwell?"

"No, monsieur, but the chamber below not yet. It seems to come to me all at once like somezings I have dream' in ze night or ven I vas in ze trance to-day. I see somezings. Monsieur, be careful. Zare vas outside four detective mens. I zee, like a dream, three come to ze door an' ze ozzer one—What he do? What he do? Yes, now I know. When ze three are comin' in at ze front ze ozzer one climb ze big tree an' enter by ze attic window. It ees a sly trick, monsieur. Zat man is now hide in zis house to zee what happen after ze ozzer three go away."

"Ah!" Trimble's eyes flashed knowingly. "Then back to work we go, for he must not catch us talking. Splendid trick that, but he didn't dream

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that he had Annette's intuition to contend with."

"Yes, work like nozzing happen—me, too, in ze kitchen wiz ze dinner."

Almost swiftly the two men resumed their pretense at work. The great clock in the hall struck five. Trimble, with a book open, came to Gramling at his desk.

"I was wondering," he whispered, "if I'd not better stay here with you to-night?"

"Suit your own convenience about that," Gramling said. "Are you needed in town?"

"Not as much, it seems to me, as I am here. My temper is up, and it is caused by the same thing that is making you hot under the collar at this very moment. You are exasperated by the delay in relieving Lucia's suspense."

"Yes. But what is to be done?" Gramling all but groaned. "Why, it is enough to turn her hair gray, waiting on us all this time without a word from us. Can we rely on Annette's intuition that the man is really concealed in the house?"

"I think so—she seems very positive about it."

At this moment Annette came in from the kitchen, wiping her flour-coated hands on a white apron. She came straight to them.

"You ask about me—I feel zat," she said. "You vant to know about zat man. He is here. I have zee heem wiz my own eyes on ze attic stairs. He sneak all about an' listen an' look—in ze *salon*; in ze library downstairs; in ze dining

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room—all about. You vish to tell ma'mselle— But ah no! Eet is too risk' still yet. Enough—I go back to ze kitchen."

"We dare not rap on the door, either, I presume," Gramling muttered.

"Oh no, that would be a give-away of a sort. We might go search for the prowler, but that, in itself, would excite suspicion. It looks as if there is no way out of it but to let poor Lucia suffer suspense till we are safe from observation."

Gramling groaned softly. He was pale, and sullen flames smoldered in his eyes. "It is terrible to be helpless like this when a frail woman is stretched on the rack," he muttered.

"Yes, but it can't be avoided," Trimble responded, sympathetically. "God knows I feel for you, Gramling, for I see what Lucia is to you."

Gramling was silent, his head bent lower over his manuscript, and Trimble went back to his pretended occupation.

At sundown Annette announced dinner, and the two friends went into the dining room and sat facing each other. Trimble even had an open book beside him. Annette came with the soup.

"I have heem zee again," she whispered, bending between the two. "He ees a small man an' move soft like a t'ief—watch, watch, an' listen. He look in ze library where you work, an' seem' all mixed up. He jump back ven you move an' hide queek. Poor, dear ma'mselle! Is she to stay ze whole night down zare?"

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"It looks like it," Trimble answered. "At any rate, she ought to know that her hiding place has not yet been discovered."

"*Oui, oui*, monsieur, zat ees true, but still it ees bad for her."

Gramling pushed his soup back. He had no inclination to drink it or eat the other things Annette brought in.

When the meal was ended Trimble proposed that they sit out on the lawn and smoke, that being the most natural thing to do before retiring for the night.

Accordingly they took a rustic seat near the front porch. It was now growing dark. Suddenly Trimble noticed the gleam of a cigarette beyond a hedge a hundred yards to his left, and fixed his eyes on it.

"I believe they are all still on guard," he murmured, "waiting for a report from the man inside. We certainly have a persistent bunch to contend with. They can't see how Lucia could have got away, and they refuse to believe that she is not still here. Besides, I think they suspect that you are befriending her."

"Perhaps." Gramling slowly nodded.

Nothing unusual happened and at ten o'clock the two men went into the house. "We have to pretend to go to bed, whether we do or not," Trimble said. "I'm afraid that you will not get much rest, with your mind in its present state."

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Gramling made no response. He was thinking of Lucia's plight, and shuddered.

"I'm going to lie on the lounge with one eye open." Trimble smiled. "It is not an easy thing to sleep with a sly prowler like that around."

Annette came to them from the kitchen. "Listen," she said. "I have somezing seen. Ven you outside an' I was in my room wiz no light an' ze door a little open, I hear zat man tip-tip wizout his shoes on ze floor. He went to a window, an' I see heem scratch a soft match an' ven it burn he make it go round in a ring ziz vay." Annette made a circle with her hand. "Twice he do zat, an' zen slip tip-tip away again."

"A signal to the outside," Trimble said, "and it was in our favor. He was making a naught."

"Vat I do?" Annette said. "It ees wrong to sleep ven ma'mselle is treat' like zat. I go to my room, but I sleep not. I vant to zee if zat man sneak away. I vill vake you if he does."

"It is hard on you," Trimble said, feelingly, "but do as you wish. I think none of us will sleep much."

CHAPTER XLI

IN some fashion the night dragged by. Annette was up early and at her duties in the kitchen. At seven o'clock Trimble left his couch and met Gramling as he was descending the stairs.

"Hasn't had his clothes off," was the professor's mental comment as he viewed the downcast face of his friend. They went to the library, that being the safest place for an exchange of words in private.

"Nothing," said Trimble, in answer to Gramling's anxious stare. "And you?"

"Nothing at all," Gramling replied, dejectedly.

Here Annette appeared at the door and came to them with a slow step of assumed deliberation.

"Well?" Trimble asked.

"He ees still in ze house," she said, under her breath. "I have not sleep but little naps like a cat. I hear heem in ze night, here, zare, an' all over. He have ate somezings in ze kitchen. I have left ze sandwiches an' count zem, an' he made ze coffee on ze gas an' try to clean ze pot, but leave ze grounds in ze spout like a man. Ef I had ze drugs I could heem made seek wiz ze sandwiches."

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"I'm glad you didn't," smiled Trimble; "that might have betrayed us."

"Vell, come have ze coffee an' toast in ze breakfast room," Annette said, and they followed her from the library.

Here they felt safe to speak, but there was little to say, and a mood of turgid depression lay on them all.

"Ve must somezing do," Annette urged, sadly. "How long zat man stay an' vatch us nobody can tell, an' ma'mselle down zare wiz no word of hope or any sign zat we live."

"Is she supplied with everything?" Gramling questioned, an anxious look in his eyes, a quiver checked in his throat.

"Yes, monsieur, everyzing—even ze water wiz ze ice an' ze electric stove to make ze coffee an' ze toast. Fruit, too—yes, everyzing but company an' news."

After breakfast, while they all sat at the table, Trimble suddenly said: "I've been thinking it over. My sole hope now lies in completely cowing Dunton. I must see him to-day. I've been severe with him. I must be even more so now. He must be made to call these men off. I am working on his fears and superstition. Can you help me, Annette?"

"I don't know, monsieur," the woman said. "I vill try vat I can. Let me alone, please—one hour, two hours. I have heem zee—zat awful man in a nap-dream last night. He ees wilt' up in

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ze fear of vat you heem told and knows not vat to do. Ze money he zees vanish, an' it is ze life wiz heem. Yes, you heem zee zis morning sure. Be ready for ze car. I come back to you."

Leaving the breakfast dishes where they were, she went to her room. The two men repaired to the library. Trimble took up a book and, strolling about as for exercise while reading, he went to the upper floor and shut himself in one of the front rooms. Presently he returned, still apparently interested in his book. He leaned over Gramling at his desk.

"They are still on the job," he said, "all three of them. A man arrived in a car just now—had the same look as the others. He stopped only a minute, handed the leader a paper, and whisked away. They are still sure that Lucia is here, and why I can't tell."

Half an hour later Annette came downstairs. "Now," she said to Trimble, "I help if I can. Maybe a little, maybe not at all, but ve try hard zis time."

Surmising that the two might want to confer in private, Gramling went to the table at which Lucia had worked and sat down. The fact that neither of the two had protested against his leaving showed him that he was right in his surmise, but he didn't object. In their own peculiar way they were working for the liberation of Lucia, and nothing else counted but her immediate release.

CHAPTER XLII

THAT was an eventful morning in Dunton's suite at the hotel. The sun was scarcely up when Redwood knocked at his door. Dunton was in bed and so ill that he could hardly raise himself up to answer the summons.

"Why, what in the name of God—" Redwood began, and checked himself as his astonished eyes swept his employer from head to foot. He had never before seen Dunton in his pajamas, and the scrawny man before him seemed a living mummy of yellowing skin and bones topped by a disheveled mass of hair over a glaring pair of blood-shot eyes.

"I haven't slept a wink," he faltered, a child-like stare of appeal bent on Redwood. "All night long my mind has been rolling this thing over and over. Every minute I was expecting your phone message. What is the matter?"

"Hell to pay, and they blame you!" growled the detective.

"Me? What has happened?"

"They say they had the girl cornered in the Gramling mansion where she was at work, but that you held off and queered the game. She may have got wind of it. At any rate, they

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can't find her about the place, though they still think she is there. The captain says the money is due him and he is going to have it."

"Not before he—"

"Yes, right away. He gave you notice that all was ripe and you held off till everything went crooked."

Dunton sank back on his bed and groaned. "Don't you see that I am in no condition to make settlements or discuss—"

"Say, listen to me," Redwood fairly thundered as he stood over the crushed man. "Just then you said something. You are in no condition to make settlements, and the trouble is, as I see it, and as the captain does, that you may be too far gone to pay us at all if we wait another twenty-four hours. I want my money and the captain wants his. We've got your signed agreement, but in case you croak on us we'd have to put our claim against your estate through the courts and be a long time getting it, if it came at all. Debts of this kind against a dead man would have a shady look to the average jury. No, Dunton, we want a cash settlement at once. The captain is waiting downstairs. I'd advise you not to meet him. He has a rough temper."

Dunton raised himself on his elbow. "But if—if I pay him and you off you will drop the case," he gasped.

"Not if you agree to make further payments when the job is completed," said Redwood.

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"Take my advice, Dunton, write out those checks and sign them. There will be a hell of a row if you don't, and no end of nasty publicity."

Like an automaton, the banker rose, crept across the floor into his sitting room, and sat down at his desk. Redwood was close behind him.

"I'll fill the blanks for you," he suggested, noting the half-palsied hand that was fumbling for a check book in a rack.

Dunton nodded, groaned assent, and on the top of the desk the detective, with visible elation, filled the blanks of two checks.

"There you are, Dunton," he said, tearing the checks from their stubs and laying them before the baffled eyes of the banker.

Slowly and with great difficulty Dunton affixed his signature, and as Redwood grasped the checks he inquired, almost aimlessly:

"Will he go on with the—the search?"

"Oh yes—now that this is paid. Shall I tell him you are ready to sign a fresh agreement?"

Dunton deliberated wildly, his undecided eyes on the face of the callous questioner. "Does he think he knows where she is?"

"Yes, he is pretty sure that she is still hidden in the Gramling house. He will guard the place for a while. What do you say? Shall he keep his men on the job?"

"Yes," Dunton sighed, "for the present, anyway."

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"I'll decide positively later in the day as to a further agreement. You spoke of my ill health. Do you really think I am in a bad fix?"

"Are you kidding me?" Redwood suddenly asked, blandly. "Don't you know your condition? Didn't that doctor tell you the other day? To be straight with you, I can't see how you can expect to pull through the rest of the summer. I've seen sick men walk, Dunton, but you are the first moving dead one I ever ran across. The strange part of it is that you don't know it. I was just wondering, old man, where are your effects going to? Who are your heirs? Lord! what a pile of swag you will leave—the girl's as well as yours—and for what! You are a mystery to me, you surely are."

"I—I suppose I am," Dunton whined, stroking his dry brow with his talonlike hand. "I am beginning to think I'll die if this goes on. Say, leave me now, but send that doctor to me—the one that was here. Oh, I forget his name."

"I know who you mean," answered the detective. "All right, and I'll keep the captain's men on the job till you decide what you will do."

"All right, but get the—the doctor as soon as you can."

Dunton, when left alone, tottered back to his bed, holding to the backs of chairs and supporting himself against the walls.

He slept for an hour or more and was waked by a rap on his door. "Come in," he called out, feebly.

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It was the doctor who had visited him before, and who now advanced to his bedside. "How are you feeling now, Mr. Dunton?" he asked.

"No better, Doctor," Dunton answered. "Tell me, what can you do for me?"

The physician avoided the anxious stare from the dark-ringed eyes.

"I am afraid I can give you no more hope than I did the other day," he replied. "I asked you then—in fact, I implored you—to get your mind off of all excitement and cares. You haven't followed my advice; I can see that you haven't."

"No, I simply could not do it," Dunton wailed, softly. "There were matters too important to drop. They are not yet settled, and—"

The doctor raised his hand. "Don't go into it," he said, firmly. "You are beyond me, Mr. Dunton. I don't want to be rough with a dying man, but you are the most stubborn patient I ever had."

"So you can't do anything?"

"Nothing except to advise you earnestly to get your affairs in order—make your will, if you want one and haven't made it."

"I have no heirs," faltered Dunton.

"Then perhaps it doesn't matter."

"No, it doesn't matter. Doctor, I did what you, as a physician, may think was a silly thing, but I consulted a man who claims to have a certain power for mental healing."

"Oh, well, they are very common. Some do

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good and some don't. I have sent a few of my patients to such practitioners, and they have been benefited, more or less, in various ways."

"This man was recommended to me," Dunton went on, tentatively, his eyes slowly fixing the doctor's, "and—and I had—well, I had quite an experience with him. You may have heard of him—Professor Trimble?"

"I know him well," answered the doctor. "A most remarkable man—stands high in the respect of my profession as a conscientious scientific investigator."

"But he pretends to understand a whole lot about certain psychic laws that are unknown to others."

"Well, I think he does."

"You think he does?" in slow surprise.

"Oh yes; he has entered a broad and most important field. And it is in its infancy. He has opened my eyes to many truths of which I was ignorant."

"Then, Doctor, you don't think that he would set about to make money by—by any underhanded method?"

"He is the last man on earth to do such a thing. He doesn't want money. He could have been a millionaire long ago if he had desired it."

Dunton lay back on his pillows. "I may have misjudged him," he said. "Do you really think he knows anything about the survival of the soul and things of that sort?"

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"Oh yes. He has convinced me of that beyond a doubt. I met him in London the first time, where he was making some studies with the Society for Psychical Research, and went to some of their meetings. They looked upon him over there as the American leader of the work."

"What did he do that was strange?" Dunton asked, anxiously.

The doctor laughed softly. "He made a new man of me. My wife, who was over there with me, fell ill, and I was up with her so much and on such a constant strain night and day for a month that when she finally died and I was to bring her remains back with me to America I was almost a nervous wreck. I sent for him. He told me if I would submit to hypnotism at his hands that I would regain my normal condition at once. At first I found it hard to relax and yield my will to his, but in my weariness and despair I finally succeeded and began to have a sense of most delicious drowsiness. The last thing I remember hearing him say with his eyes fixed on mine were these words:

"'You are going to have a restful sleep, Doctor, and when you wake you will not be morbid over the loss of your wife, for you will understand some things in regard to death that you have never understood before.'"

"And did you?" Dunton queried, as a condemned man to a priest.

"Yes, but I cannot explain what they were.

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I only know that I saw life differently. I no longer had the feeling that my wife was dead. I felt cheerful, hopeful, even joyous."

"Do you"—Dunton started, paused, swallowed, and went on, huskily—"do you think he could help me?"

The doctor hesitated. Then he said, slowly, reluctantly: "I don't see how he could possibly help you *physically*, Mr. Dunton, but I am sure that he could remove much of the high nervousness that is hastening your end. In any case, you would do well to take his advice. I'll tell you frankly he can do more for you than I can."

When the physician was gone Dunton had a sharp struggle with himself. Time after time he would rise, approach the phone, put out his enfeebled hand for the receiver, and withdraw it.

What would be the good of it? he reflected. Trimble would simply repeat his old demand, and that meant the entire loss to him of Lucia's fortune. But what did her fortune or his amount to if he was to die so soon?

Finally he called up Trimble's number. "Yes," someone answered, "the professor has just come in. Here he is now."

Dunton gave his name and fell to coughing so that he could not start what he was ready to say.

"Oh, is that you, Mr. Dunton?" came from Trimble. "What can I do for you?"

"May I see you right away?" Dunton managed to get out.

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"Yes. Where are you—hotel? . . . Yes. All right. I'll run right over."

Dunton hung up the receiver. There was a vague sense of relief on him as he crept back to his bed and lay down, his eyes on the ceiling. This feeling lasted, however, for only a few minutes. He got up, went to his desk, and sat with a frown of suspicion on his parchment-like face.

This doctor, he thought, might be working with Trimble in the gigantic scheme to deprive him of Lucia's interests. Why hadn't he thought of that? Was his brain power failing him, that he should be such easy prey to designing men? Why shouldn't this doctor praise Trimble? That was only a part of the game. Well, the only thing to do now was to wait for Trimble and see what he had to say.

CHAPTER XLIII

AFTER Trimble had driven away that morning Gramling sat at his desk pretending to be busy. The persistent thought that Lucia was still in suspense in a veritable prison was all but maddening. Couldn't something be done to cheer her confinement? He could think of nothing, with that prowling spy about the house.

Late that afternoon Annette came to him from the *salon*. She was treading softly and glancing furtively toward the hall.

"Zat man just now slipped into ma'mselle's room," she announced. "I vas in my room and zee heem go in zar."

Gramling flushed red with exasperation. "It is an outrage," he said. "Listen to me, Annette. We can't keep Lucia down there like this through another endless night. Something must be done. At present that one man is preventing our reaching her at least with a signal. As the owner of this house I have a right to regard him as a burglar out and out. You say he has been to the pantry and stolen things?"

"Yes, monsieur: he ees a t'ief, but still ve must be careful."

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Gramling, still red with fury, said nothing, and Annette turned and went to the kitchen. Presently Gramling set his lips tight, opened a drawer of his desk, and took out a revolver which he slipped into the pocket of his short coat. Then he went out into the hall, tiptoeing softly. Under the main stairway was a small, dark room for the storage of articles not in use, and as he was about to pass it he paused, unlocked the door, and peered in. It contained nothing but a few boxes, barrels, and old trunks. He shut the door and tested the key in the lock, then, leaving the door slightly open, he went on up the stairs, still walking stealthily. When near Lucia's room he stopped to listen. He heard a sound as of a drawer being opened.

Sure now that the man was still in the room, and grasping his revolver, he suddenly appeared at the door. The detective, without hat, coat, or shoes, was bent over the lowest drawer of Lucia's chiffonier which he had drawn out on the floor.

For a moment Gramling stood looking at him, then, presenting his revolver, he said, sternly:

"Hold up your hands!"

A startled look of terror spread over the detective's face as he glanced up and saw the steadily poised weapon.

"Don't shoot!" he cried, holding up his hands and twisting his body around. "I'm a detective with the authority to—"

"Stand up!" Gramling thundered, "and don't

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lower your hands if you care a rap for your life."

The man tremblingly obeyed. "You don't understand," he panted, pleadingly. "I'm a detective. I belong to the force that—"

"Old gag, that!" Gramling sneered, fiercely. "I'm a detective, myself; I detected you easily enough. You are a thief—you've already robbed my pantry and are trying to find valuables in this room. Walk ahead here down the stairs."

"But I tell you"—the detective held back, his eyes flashing wildly—"that I am with the men who were here yesterday. I left my badge with my coat outside or I—"

"Don't argue with me!" Gramling raised his revolver higher. "I can prove by a good witness that you are a burglar. I am going to hold you till I phone for the police. Walk on down the stairs!"

The cowed man moved on as commanded till the lower floor was reached, but here he turned again. "Let me go to the door and signal the others. They will substantiate what I say."

"What do you take me for?" Gramling half laughed. "You might signal to a whole band of crooks that would overpower me in a minute. There are no detectives outside. They told me yesterday that they were going away, and I believe them."

"You will suffer for this!" The prisoner was becoming obstinate and taking another tack. "I am an authorized detective—"

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"Even so, you are a thief caught in the act. Do you see that door under the stairs? Open it and go in and sit down and rest. You've been on your feet for quite a while."

The man swayed to and fro hesitatingly.

"What do you intend to do?" he asked.

"Phone for the police and keep you locked in till they get here."

"But why not call the men in from the outside?"

"Because, even if they lied and are still there, I want to turn you over to the police and handle you in due form as a thief caught in the act. Don't keep me waiting. Walk in that room!"

At the door the man suddenly turned. His wavering eyes flashed as they rested on the revolver, and Gramling saw in his face the determination to make a fight for liberty rather than submit to the indignity of such confinement as lay before him. Gramling saw his muscles set as for a spring, and made the wisest move possible. He simply stepped back a single pace and aimed his revolver steadily.

"Your life is in your own hands," he said, grimly. "Move this way an inch and I'll fire."

"All right—all right," the thwarted man said, sullenly. "I'll go in, but you'll suffer for this, and heavily."

"Go ahead; we are losing time!" Gramling ordered, and the man of his own accord opened the door and went into the room.

Gramling had just locked the door and removed

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the key when Annette hurried to him from the *salon*.

"*Mon Dieu, monsieur!*" she cried. "I have you zee an' am astound'. Vat you do now, monsieur?"

"Rap a signal on Lucia's door, and then phone the police," he answered, grimly, his jaws set. "I may have acted foolishly, but I could not help it."

"Foolish, no, I zink not, monsieur. He ees one t'ief an' you got 'im—zat all; but ze police not yet a little while. And ze signal to ma'mselle—I make heem if you say yes. You must zis door guard wiz ze revolver. Ve must wait till ze professor come. He ees now in hees car on ze road wiz great hurry. In ze mind I have him zee like a flash."

"Well, you go down," Gramling agreed, "and when Lucia opens the door cheer her all you can and tell her not to be frightened if she has to stay longer."

"Yes, monsieur." And the Frenchwoman hastened away.

Nervously Gramling paced up and down in front of the closed room. He was not sure but that he had taken an unwise step, but there was a certain amount of satisfaction in the thought that by it he had relieved Lucia's suspense. Presently he began to be impatient for the return of Annette. What could be keeping her?

Half an hour passed, and then she came. Her kindly face showed signs of distress. "I have her zee," she faltered. "She open ze door, but oh,

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monsieur, I have not expect so mooch ze despair. She ees vare, vare sad, an' no hope can zee. She veep, monsieur—she veep zat she so mooch care to you an' ze kind professor."

"And you left her that way?" Gramling all but groaned. "You locked her in again without hope or—"

"Vot I could do, monsieur? I lie, and she zee it in ze eyes wiz ze tear I cannot keep down. I cheer her up an' I choke wiz ze woman pain in my heart. Vat you do wiz zat man?" nodding toward the door of the closet.

"I think I ought to notify the police at once," Gramling said. "I have no right to hold him longer than is absolutely necessary."

"Yes, maybe zat so, monsieur."

They went together to a phone at the end of the hall. Gramling was looking up the number in the directory when the sound of a key in the lock of the front door reached them. It was Trimble, and he strode down to them hurriedly. He held a legal document in his hand and waved it triumphantly.

"Free! Free!" he cried. "She is as free as a bird in the sky!"

"Free?" the others cried, in a breath.

"Yes, Dunton was all in by the time I reached him, and soon agreed to do the right thing. Lucia's property is now in her own name and the charge against her is lifted. Dunton unloaded a great burden from his cankered soul. I am to

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'give him treatment and I may prolong his life for a while, frail as it is.'

"And the detectives?" Gramling wanted to know.

"They have been called off. I met them returning to New York as I was driving out."

Here Gramling told about the man in the closet, and a grave look, blended with high amusement, spread over the professor's face.

"You did a ticklish thing," he said, "but your charge against him for rifling the pantry would clear you in any court. Let me get rid of him. I'll know how to do it."

Annette and Gramling sat waiting while Trimble, unarmed, went to the closed door. They heard him making suave explanations and giving wholesome advice in his happiest vein. The cowed detective seemed glad to get away without facing his companions, and left the house quietly.

"Good! Now that is settled, too!" the professor cried. "Now, Gramling, you are appointed to release Lucia. Don't keep her waiting."

Gramling glanced at Annette. "I think perhaps you'd better go," he suggested.

"No, monsieur." She stolidly shook her head. "Zat ees for you zis time, please. Remember zis ees your home an' she must be made welcome by ze host."

"Ah, quite true!" chimed in Trimble, with a merry laugh, and Gramling arose.

At the foot of the stairs he paused, and then

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rapped the signal on the door. There was a delay. He rapped again and waited. He was becoming alarmed when the door was cautiously opened. The chamber was in darkness and at first he did not see Lucia, who stood back a few feet from the threshold.

"Lucia!" he cried out, and she advanced into the light. "Lucia, you are safe! It is all over! You are free!"

"You can't mean that—" she began, grasping his hands eagerly, "that my brother—" Her voice broke under its tense strain.

"Yes, he admits your complete sanity and has turned all your interests over to you. Trimble managed it most successfully, he and Annette between them."

Lucia swayed toward him and he supported her by his arm. He aided her to ascend the steps to the next floor, and there stood Trimble and Annette, ready to receive her. Trimble's face was a study of clashing emotions. It was as if he had much to say and yet could not utter anything. Lucia seemed to comprehend, and she went straight to him, put her hands on his shoulders, and kissed him on the cheek.

"My good, good friend!" she half sobbed, her eyes full of tears. "I know what you have done for me, and all the rest of my life I shall be grateful."

Blushing red, and muttering something inaudible, Trimble slipped into the library, leaving

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Lucia in Annette's arms. Gramling stood, abashed, near by. All at once he said to Annette, his eyes downcast:

"Tell her my secret. I don't want to deceive her any longer."

"Vare well, monsieur; it is best," the woman agreed, as Lucia stood staring in wonder. "I vill tell it all, an' ma'mselle vill understand."

Gramling turned away and Lucia was led by Annette into the *salon*, where they sat talking for half an hour. Presently Annette came out. There was a delicious strain from the piano behind her.

"Oh, she ees so happy!" the Frenchwoman exulted. "Ah, she play now! Listen to zat! God ees good, Monsieur Gramling, an' ze eternal law is perfect. Ve have had ze pain—ve now have ze joy! Ve pay ze great price and ve have ze great reward."

He nodded in agreement and she turned from him. Lucia's music drew him to her presence. He knew that Annette and Trimble would leave her to him for a while, and he approached and stood close behind her. Dusk was falling and the room was not lighted as yet. She seemed to feel his proximity, and was lifting her hands from the keys when he cried: "Don't stop, please! Don't, Lucia! Your music is divine. I could listen to it always."

But she did stop, and turned her glowing face up to his.

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"I could play always in my present mood," she said, fervently. "Who is there alive that can comprehend my feeling of relief? Oh, it is divine! It is a touch of heaven!"

He nodded, and she rose and stood facing him. "And so, after all, I was working for you, Mr. Gramling!" She laughed merrily. "I was eating your food and living under your roof."

"Yes, and you are never to leave it, Lucia," he cried. "You must be my wife. I cannot live without you. I tried it for the few hours you were tormented below, and know that I cannot leave you."

He took her hands, and he felt her soft, throbbing fingers coil trustingly about his own. "I missed you, too," she said, simply. "Down there alone last night in deadly solitude and quiet I realized—"

"Realized what?" he interpolated, seeing that she had stopped and was avoiding his eyes. "What did you realize, Lucia?"

"I think you know," she answered, and for the first time she raised her lips to meet his.

THE END

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